WORDEATER

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The Beauty of Childbirth

Anonymous

Sciatica for the last four months;
one-hundred extra pounds.
My boobs are huge; my hair is straight.
My navel could be used for a landfill.
Labor's begun—for real this time.
On the monitor, his heart rate has dropped!
Nurses...oxygen...Doc is sweating.
Oh my God...salad tongs!
Wait! No one asked me I promise I'll push!

It's a boy! (With a pointed head
and tong marks on his small, contoured face.)

Ten pounds of flesh yanked from my groin.
Welcome to your life, my child, this is it—
full of pain and...oh, look at that...
Why, it's a U-shaped needle to sew...
oh.....Thank God for the meds!
Labor is hell
but I would do it again.
It is a labor of love.

Gearshift

Anonymous

I am looking at the lights
of your gearshift reflected in
the passenger side window.
I can see the lights of the dashboard
and the radio.
There must be another Toyota
I see the driver looks like you
exasperated and flippant,
jaw set
wondering what he ever did to deserve this.
Wait - the passenger
looks just like me.
She is wailing above the radio,
water all down her face
and sorry to put him through this.
I think they despise each other.
I think they're sorry
they ever met.
I think she's thankful
she's going home.
I think they're comforted
that they'll telephone as soon
as they're apart, hateful on the phone,
they know it's easy to make up
as faceless voices.
Until the next time I see
the hate-filled Toyota floating next to us.

Dreams

Scott Bick

Only in dreams
I see myself
As I can really be
I can be whoever
And be free
Only in dreams
That can't last forever

Untitled

Michael Brandon

Laughter is what holds me together
Laughter is the seems that lie within
I do not even know where to begin

without joking
without joshing
without kidding around

With laughter I am free of my pain

Free like an eagle in chains
Free like a psycho with brains
Free like a murderer with stains

Stains that stay

Stains which I cannot rub away

Stains that I must live with and hide day to day.

Washed Out

Angela Brooks

everything seems faded
memories don't always launder the senses,
sometimes the dirt stains forever
and spread into distorted shapes
that are indelible.

Untitled

J. Cavallero

And so it was said...

...And there was a quiet terror that
suffered my senses when vast hazes
of gold washed earth ward from star heaven
skies on silent nights

...And there was a sudden
masculine scent of air
that was hanging
over my sweaty mouth during
midwinter storms breaking,
twisting, the illusions
of summer breezes.

And so it was said...

Untitled

J. Cavallero

once my heart pounded
once it sat silent
Bleeding
throughout it's entire existence
moving my body
touching my spirit
definitely feeling my soul

To touch life inside of life
to breathe inside of another breath
feeling beyond the skin
breaking into the blood stream
crack the skull
and feel the brain pulse

The ritual beating of the drums
are the ritual beating of my heart
my soul

Untitled

J. Cavallero

dripping perspiration, desperation,
a suicide nation, masturbation
pleasing touching sensation

let go of the wrecking ball

To feel love to understand the need
happiness and desperation
longing to support another
diving under the covers
Never getting close enough

To burrow inside his chest and fall asleep

Untitled
J. Cavallero

the bitter sweet memories
of the pain, adopted pleasure
and gentle sounds of insecurity

Each day dripping away the salty tears
of a leaky sink.

A cold foot is the tingling surprise
that we can feel, and that we are still
Alive!

So rivers grow wider and oak trees
grow stronger
We grow up, and then we become smaller.

Our memories, our history, our love,
    and our understanding
But with the lack of understanding,
    we stumble upon
A known situation.
Situation after situation until...
it all compiles it's self into
a whole day, which then becomes
a page in the book of
Poor Richards Almanac
Poor Poor Richard

h Valentine m
(in homage to Henry V. Miller)
J.A. Carroll

Rumpled trousers, balding pate,
He was the man critics loved to hate.

Skipping around gay Paris,
He was the man they called Henri.

A single franc here, a centime there,
His finances? In disrepair.

Anais, his lover with a quill,
June, in New York, he loves her still.

Patron of prostitutes, lover of wine,
He could piss on the street and not pay a fine.

The Paris streets, echoing history.
His own life, still a mystery.

Hey Jack Kerouak (or is it Daniels?)
J.A. Carroll

You fashion yourself a poet
You revel in your angst
You wallow in the pain you feel
For attention, you give thanks

No depth is in your bloodshot eyes
Just whiskey and smoke from cafes
Dashboard lights and long, lonely nights
Reality your Beatnik-self betrays

A loner on the road to nowhere
A thousand lost loves you mourn
Alcoholic tears spill down your cheeks
Alone since you were born

Cry, cry, you be-bob-bastard
It's not her blood or your own
80-proof run through your veins
now reap what you have sown

Phish
Jennifer Chubb

eyes reveal the intensity of a moment
the wind blocked our voices
but we still spoke without words
comfortable silence
no expectations
an exchange of glances
and it begins...
thoughts of you whirl around in my mind
not confusion...clarity
a random scattering of daydreams
furthers the intensity
we hid...waiting for the moment
it will fall into place...
it will come

Prodigy
Jennifer Chubb

lucid mind
invisible stars
Mozart in a glass jar
floating on the waters edge...
nightly orchestral hymns
praise the lonely and forgotten souls
exchanging roles for a moment
to see through a strangers eye
liquid paper seeps through the cracks
outlining a Freudian ego
lessons of existence mock Plato's cave
have you seen the light?
preposterous accusations of fear

The Wasteland
Mark Davenport

Onward roams the train
With grinding mechanical steps-
Past suburban farmland green,
Through the city's spray-painted
Concrete decay.

Now toils the train
To an eventual halt
At a stop where no one leaves.
Out the window I gaze
Into the murky urban night...

And lo! The wasteland,
Where trains go and die of neglect.
I see a caboose
Standing in a streetlight's silhouette,
Lonely and alone-
With no one to follow.

O caboose, rusted and worn:
Why do you stand along abandoned tracks
Where no iron dancer waltzes?

The cement and iron wasteland
Sprawls before my eyes.
How empty the space of so desolate a place-
Where the winds swarm and leave,
Though always return with their hollow roar
To the grey and murky urban night.

A Celebration of the Symbolic Wolf

Mark Davenport

In every darkened forest of thought
I see the wolf
Standing there silent and somber-
The moon peering tonelessly over his shoulder,
His coat ashen as the grave's sorrowful grey.

And his eyes! His sad sullen eyes!
How they stare into the shallow depths
    of this very soul,
Solemn in their unspoken observation
And silent in their unmoving gaze.

O how I yearn for this wolf
To speak
With a tongue made wise by centuries;
To lead
By mighty kingly gallop;
To shelter
From the ominous trees that look ahead.

But the wolf simply stands
in every darkened forest of thought.
The moon peers tonelessly over his shoulder,
And his eyes simply stare,
Revealing none of their wisdom.

You and I - We're Free

Brad Dornick

There's ties that bind
and then there's the binds that tie us
a somewhat fucked up ratio
    of supply and demand
a love of what the other possesses
you and I, we fall together
you and I, we act alone
I'll let you cry; if that's what you need
and you'll turn away as I roll up my sleeves
we're both the lion and the zoo keeper
stuck together in one cage
you and I, we're what the other feeds
you and I, we're the same

On Easter Day, both of us were saved
cleansed by candles and serum
born again in sweat and disease
injected into each other
inside one another
you and I, we're free
you and I, we're free

Rain Dogs

Brad Dornick

one day I'll come down
all these tracks will be left behind
I'll come to stay
and you will recognize my new skin
the dollar - a - day devils
will dance around the blue palm trees
the spiders will call out to you,
"Come lick me!"
the rain dogs will come down from the hills
coyotes will take over these streets
Blue will take off to run with them
their scent will linger for days
the sun will color the blood of the world
and the sins will wash into the sea

Graveyards

Brad Dornick

I was riding on the upper-deck of an observation car, better known as the "Dome Room," on the "Greyline" Amtrack bound for New York City, New York. I had mashed myself in to the corner of the two-person seat and found my self scanning bits of other passengers conversations. The lights of the "Dome Room" were still on, so as I stared out the thick plexiglas windows, my own reflection gazed back, more often than not.

As 9 or 10 p.m. finally churned around, depending on whether or not we quietly had slipped into the Eastern Time Zone, the lights were put to bed. The lights of the train dimmed, and so too did the chatter of the others. The moon shown down upon us travelers through the lake of glass and in that moon's light one could see the partially clouded night. Yet the moon was as full as a newborn mother's hope for her child. Certain spots, not obscured by the clouds, were visible. But there wasn't too much to see anyway. Fields, empty lots, and graveyards of dispersed automobile parts. And trees, so many trees, to try and prohibit the sight of the fields, the lots, and the junkyards.

While hunkering up there alone, sluggishly squeezed into my hole, it became evident that she would not leave my thoughts for the duration if this trip, and more and more it seemed, for the extent of my life. With the moon's eyes peering in, I envisioned her and I crammed together in the seat where I sit alone. The gentle wobbling of the train would have been a turn-on instead, it only caused me to thunk my head repeatedly into the stainless steel window frames. Train travel could be romantic when you're together, or, as desolate as a forgotten southwestern road when you're alone.

And I would be making this trip "alone." Although I was traveling with a companion, I'll be going it "alone" for a long, long while. It had been nearly seven months since she left me, and I carry more baggage now, than I did then. There was absolutely nothing to see here. And yet I couldn't tear my eyes away. I kept longing for something to show through, but nothing ever did. And neither did she.

Spine

Brad Dornick

i try not to crush the eggs
but these shells - they still stay in bed
you asked if i'd mow your lawn
seems as though all your grass has gone
is that a sign - a sign
and that's fine - all fine

there's a wall that holds it all back
white enamel gets covered by plaque
i show you all of my cracks
only your teflon is shown back
and it shines, and shines
god it blinds - and it blinds

do they refuse to see i exist
and if i go - would i be missed
these nights - they never change
these nights are always days
they're yours - not mine
that's a lie - yes a lie
and they're blind-
all blind
that's fine-
so fine
you're mine-
not mine
except my spine-
my crooked
s
p
i
n
e

A.M.~

Brad Dornick

Well - she flinches in her sleep
and she shys away from me
she mumbles right and left
dream words under her breath
she says she's just a friend
but not from 3 to 10

She sleeps in the middle of my bed
spends all day running through my head
always tries to make me smile
I only do when she doesn't go that mile
only with me when her days end
sometime between 3 to 10

The white angel of my black nights
she's the dark horse of my life
holds a pain my morphine can't cure
her past was always a blur
someday this all will end
and then i'll long - for 3 to 10

"You are the Chosen"

Brad Dornick

undefiled snow lay before me
just waiting to be touched
no tracks of previous travelers
19 years without a mark

so pristine-
with rustic beauty
forgotten somewhere by other callers
somehow discovered by me

to spoil the ground-
an immaculate sin
to not voyage on-
the damnation of men

never before-
have I blazed my own path
to conquer this purity-
my mark that would last

shivers creep up my spine
whether not to forge on
and if I spoil the body
for which period will it long

to walk away-
would bring waterfalls from the ice
to flounder in it's virgin drifts-
only further complicate life

never will I know
which of these selections is right
but soon I must choose
for the day has been given to night

I do not wish to be remembered for this path
but I cannot walk another way
the virgin body will decide for me
these words the ground shall say

Today is the Day

Glenn E. Dyer

The shelling stopped around 11:00 - 11:15 p.m. After checking the platoon areas and finding no injuries or other damage, the Lieutenant crawled back in his foxhole. The shelling itself did little damage, unless some poor devil happened to be taking a leak before trying to get some sleep, or worse, taking a crap over a straddle trench. The latter presented a problem - should he fall over sideways flat on the ground (or mud) and pray or fall forward into the trench for safety and worry about the stink later. After a fitful sleep of five hours or so, the Lieutenant woke up, bone chilled from the cold November air and the near freezing water in the bottom of the foxhole. Today is the day!

He had joined the regiment in Italy, north of Naples, as a rifle company commander, taking over a company that was still on the line, with only seven men left out of a normal complement of six officers and roughly a hundred seventy five men. Twice in Italy he had been combat wounded and hospitalized for several weeks each time. Now in eastern France when the big push to enter Germany is about to begin, what he has been looking forward to, he gets this message - Today is the day! He had always accepted getting wounded as an occupational hazard in the Infantry, but he never doubted he would come home alive. Now, for the very first time, he felt a tinge of fear.

You

Leah Errichetto

Your face is a disguise when I
look in your eyes
And I fade away back into my
mind.
I know it's real, this love that
I feel
But I don't want to deal with
the pain
Make love to me once more
Maybe open this door
Make me feel alive for a change.
Sweet memories always haunting
me
Driving me insane.

Do you remember feeling safe
in someone's arms
The joy I feel with you could only
bring me harm
That's why I seem so tough,
maybe I push you away
But I'd rather be hurt tomorrow
if you love me today.

I try to go where nobody knows
and I hide from my inside
and drown away these fears
I can't help it when the world falls
from above and crushes me
I can only cease this spreading
disease that's slowly killing me.

Black

Leah Errichetto

Drive a stake through her chest
Dig a mine in her breast
Split her head with a river
On one side you can't cross over

You're killing her,
Raping her, bleeding her,

Let her go
It's not in your nature.

Strap her down to your machine
Her blood once ran so clean
Take her body with every breath
'Til there is nothing left

Don't drink the water
It's all black
Don't breathe the air
You'll turn black.

Don't walk on the ground
It is poisoned with such rare disease
Killing her
is your nature

You put signs on her body
You put toxins in her eyes
Feed her death and manipulation
Put her through such agitation.

Untitled

Cindy Evans

Sherrie is awakened by a sharp pain. The night has been filled with tossing and turning. The weather has been sweltering and at 5:30 in the morning the house is still warm and the humidity is high. Swollen ankles and an unrelenting backache have added to her misery the last few weeks, preventing her from getting a good nights rest most of the time. She rolls over to see if Tim is awake. Her restlessness, she fears, has kept him awake most of the night, but now he is sleeping peacefully. His silhouette in the early morning light portrays a calmness that conceals his personality. A man with a gruff exterior and quick temper, he seldom lets anyone get to know the real person deep inside of him. He works hard with a zeal and determination that things will be better for his wife and children than they were for him when he was growing up. Sherrie and Tim's personalities complement each other, she being the quiet one and more inclined to think things through before acting upon them. Having been raised in a family with four brothers and having been the only daughter, she was always her father's favorite and was somewhat sheltered by him.

Another pain wrenches her body. Then another and another. She rouses Tim.

The trip to the hospital seems long, the labor coming fast and hard. She is taken directly into delivery, a room that has always seemed so cold and impersonal for such a miraculous event. Her one peace of mind is having Dr. Miller as her doctor. He has been her doctor for some years, having delivered her other three babies. He is a kind, compassionate man, and a family friend whom Sherrie trusts implicitly. Things seem to be progressing as they should.

This baby was unplanned; however, it is very much wanted. With eager anticipation the whole family is now looking forward to his or her birth.

The baby's head can be seen. One more push and he is born. It is a boy. But there is no sound. The quietness in the room is frightening!

Dr. Miller suction the baby. He works frantically to get the newborn to cry, to breathe his first breath. "Call Dr. Anthony, STAT! Tell him we have a bad baby here! It has been five minutes and we can't get him to breathe." Dr. Miller's voice is clear and insistent. The baby turns from a red to a bluish and then finally, a purplish color. If he does live, there is a good chance of brain damage because of oxygen deprivation. Unable to watch her baby die, Sherrie turns away.

"Oh God, oh God, not my baby! Please God let him live!"

A small cry. It is weak and fragile, giving the parents some hope. He scores only three on the

Apgar score, having measured a zero only minutes before. This low score, Sherrie knows, shows his chance of survival as being poor. The doctor stabilizes him and then places him inside a warm incubator and one of the nurses rushes him out of the delivery room.

"What happened? Is he going to be okay?"

"It is too soon to tell. We'll have to wait and see. Your baby had a bowel movement before he was born and swallowed the meconium. The next twenty-four hours will be the most crucial. After that we will know more. His pediatrician will be checking him over thoroughly just as soon as we can contact him."

In recovery Sherrie is in a daze. The joy and excitement of having a new baby has somehow been lost. Instead there are feelings of fear. Tim tries to soothe her. "Everything will be alright. We need to try not to panic. Right now the baby is holding his own." But there is a quiver in his voice as he speaks.

Dr. Miller comes into the recovery room. "Your baby's doctor has been here and has seen him. I'm sorry, but he has several symptoms of Down Syndrome. I want you both to understand that it is important that you do not blame yourselves."

The words Down Syndrome depict a bleak picture. This can't be happening to my baby.

Being left alone, Sherrie and Tim hold each other for some time, neither knowing what to say. A state of shock overwhelms them, as their feelings alternate between grief and fear. Tim knows he needs to go home to the other children, but he is reluctant to leave.

"I need to go home and take care of things there. I'll be back later. You try to get some rest."

Sleep doesn't come easily in spite of physical and emotional fatigue. When it does come, it does so for only a few minutes at a time and then a haze of reality awakens her. Between her unsettled minutes of sleep come words and memories that all seem to be muddled together. The doctor's words, "It is important that you don't blame yourselves," played over and over in her mind like a broken record.

Sherrie thinks about a time when she did blame herself for something tragic that happened in her family.

Entering the church, the small casket could be seen. At seven years of age, she experienced the eerie and incomprehensible feeling of death, causing her to walk slowly, hesitantly. Mrs. McNeely was helping her parents out by taking care of her and her brothers on this difficult day. Sherrie grabbed Mrs. McNeely's hand and clung to it tightly.

Approaching the front of the church, the nauseating smell of flowers made her feel sick to her stomach. The lump in her throat began to grow larger as she fought the tears welling up in her eyes. This is all my fault.

Baby Jonathan, her brother, had lived only a few days. She looked at him in the casket. He appeared to be sleeping, as if he would wake up and cry at any minute. He was dressed in a two piece light blue suit, white shirt and an adorable little bow tie. His soft baby brown hair was brushed neatly to the side. The fact that he was dead was unfathomable.

He had been born only a few days earlier. Dad called her from the hospital. "You have a new baby brother." Already having three brothers and hoping desperately for a sister, disappointment overwhelmed her, causing her to become angry and cry. If only I had not been so disappointed and gotten angry, maybe God would have let this baby live.

Sherrie carried that burden, secretly, for three and a half years until something happened.

It was almost a repeat of history. Dad was on the phone. "I know how much you wanted a sister, but you have a little brother." All the determination in the world to not be disappointed gave way to tears.

A few days later mother and the baby came home from the hospital. All of Sherrie's disappoint-

ments melted away as she held her brother and fell in love with him. The realization dawned on her that she had not been to blame for the death of her other brother. It just happened. There was no one to "blame."

As the doctor's words play over and over in her mind, "It is important that you do not blame yourselves," and feeling the assurance of that statement, sleep finally comes.

When Sherrie awakens, Tim and the doctor are standing by her bed. The obvious question, but neither of them wants to ask is, "Is our baby still alive?"

"Your baby is doing very well. But he does definitely have Down Syndrome."

The nurse walks in the room carrying a small bundle. "We have someone here who wants to meet his mother."

Sherrie stretches out her arms and gladly welcomes her new son into them and cradles him to her breast.

Tim can no longer control his emotions. Tears well up in his eyes. "It doesn't matter what is wrong with our baby. We just want to take him home and love him."

Sherrie's tears, now tears of joy, flow freely and as they fall, they brush the baby's cheeks. Gently touching his face to wipe the tears away, she says, "Heaven has one less angel today because you are here with us."

Band of Dreamers

Erica Leigh Gallagher

Join the band of dreamers
They are dreaming their lives away
But they don't do much living
Because they're asleep all day.

The more the merrier in dreamland
So join them in their slumbers
They welcome you with open arms
Because there's safety in numbers.

You'll love the things they do in there
You'll love the stories they make up
But once you join the band of dreamers
You may never again wake up.

The Cult of Frank

Erica Leigh Gallagher

I want to escape into the ears of a music man
I want to hear the things only he can.
I would do anything to have his talent of sound
A musician is the best person to be around.

I love a man who appreciates the very art
That strikes your ears and captures your heart.
Only one type of person can perform this trick
And he's a man who knows his music.

He can make you smile and make you sing
While most men can't make you do anything.
A music man can make you fall in love and then
Have you fall in love all over again.

He will enrapture you and you will see
How powerful his gift of music can be.
But since most musicians today are overdone
The best musician is a humble one.

Double Nickel and Friends
Erica Leigh Gallagher

Truck stop coffee needs sugar and cream
Truck stop people are a truck stop dream
Decaff coffee is really all caffeine
Truck stop bathrooms are quite clean.

These fine men and women are American
Some are working for the man
Some are just there to hang around
But most of them are highway bound.

Sucking on sodas but mostly coffee
Eating fat infested foods really sloppy
Talking on the phones to whoever
Feeling like they've been
    at the truck stop forever.

Truck stop folk are the cream of the crop
Every road leads to a big truck stop
Whether you're rich or poor
The truck stop always has an open door.

People so nice you'll think you're in heaven
Open all night, but don't stay past eleven
Cause too many coffees on your tab
May lead you to join a trucker in his cab.

Graveyard Love
Erica Leigh Gallagher

As you walk through the cemetery tonight,
Take that girls hands
Look into her eyes
Tell her your heart understands.

Let her know you are wrong
For not telling her how you feel about her
And that you can't live anymore
If it has to be without her.

As you walk passed grave sights
And on grass covered in dew
Tell her you love her
And want her to love you.

If she says she won't have you
But tells you how nice it's been
To spend time in the cemetery
Let her know you'll see her there again.

Me
Erica Leigh Gallagher

I don't belong
In this house, in this bed
In this room with theses thoughts
Inside my head.

I can't understand
Why I was volunteered
To be this way
To feel this weird?

Like a fish in a wetsuit
I don't quite fit in
I want to start over
Where do I begin?

I need a world around me
That understands me better
I need a twin sister
Someday I'll get her.

No one can keep up with me
I don't think even I can anymore

What is out there for me
What do I need this world for?

Does the person who I left
Care about me still?
I can't tell, and as it seems
I probably never will.

An Ode to Sonic Youth

Erica Leigh Gallagher

She was a Nazi feminist
Her boyfriend put her up to this
He said she could be a disco queen
She said put a quarter in the washing machine.

She was into indie rock
Her girlfriend tried to beat the clock
She traveled to places I've never seen
Kept on churning like gasoline.

Tell me it's true
That they could build
A place where nothings stained
A land where nothings spilled.

I heard about something
They said it's rather urgent
Can't leave home without
Laundry detergent.

Go in filthy
Come out clean
We all live
In a washing machine.

OMNI ZERO

Erica Leigh Gallagher

In the heavens above me
They said there reigned a master
They said that he would love me
And save me from disaster.

Disaster struck, I fell like a stone
Tumbled into trouble in time of desperation
I was left alone
In search of my own salvation.

In the silence of my isolated mind
They said I could reach
An Almighty Savior who could find
Time to guide and teach.

I found the time, but for Him it was bad
And he ignored all of my prayers
I couldn't believe I actually had
Thought that I had found somebody who cares.

Maybe He exists in the mind of the weak
Or only in the mind of the strong
But for the worshipping men who seek,
Don't seek His help for too long.

My Bed

Lori Goebig

My space afloat
a sea of stress.
The crisp clean sheets
my skin caress.

Slowly crawling
into my lair.
Seeking comfort
cozy there.

My island of dreams
in search of sleep.
Under the covers
my lover will creep.

Security, safety
my bed does provide.
Giving courage and comfort
unconscious I slide.

Untitled

Lori Goebig

I made a new friend
just the other day.
All covered in fluff
and eager to play.

Cuddly and playful
we started to bond.
I taught her to talk
and of her grew fond.

There is no redemption.
Black eyes shows your pain.
Please make an exception,
my faith will remain.

My dear friend now slipping,
I pray it goes fast.
The test now conclusive
my memories to last.

I lost my dear friend,
it pains me to say.
So many hours
to fill a new day.

I won't forget you
a memory away.
True friends forever
together someday.

The Long Night

Lori Goebig

Slowly I moved along the sidewalk next to the unfriendly brick building. I traced out a path with my finger in the lines of the mortar making sure I would remember the way I came. Suddenly revolving doors grabbed at my body and sucked me into it's sterile opening. Just as quickly, it deposited me on the other side, leaving me to deal with my own dilemmas.

Making sure I had my balance, I ran my hands through my hair, and drew in a deep breath. There was no reason to linger in the foyer, so I made my way over to the reception desk. There manning the front desk was a kindly volunteer. From a distance the old woman looked like she had a big piece of cotton stuck on top of her head. "So the night shift has finally arrived." She said. I glanced down at her name tag that she so proudly wore on her bosom. "How are you tonight Emma?" I asked.

"Just fine. I go home in fifteen minutes." She said.

The old lady smiled as she filled out Marilyn's room number on a sticky tag. Visitors were coming and going constantly. She didn't even have to look it up. As she handed the name tag to me, she didn't release it right away. Emma was making sure our eyes meet. The volunteer wanted me to understand. No words had to be spoken, her solemn eyes conveyed her message, it was sympathy.

When I got off the elevator, something didn't seem quite right. The hallway was quiet. It was an eerie silence. My shoes started to squeak as they stuck to the many coats of wax that had built up on the hallway floor. Feeling like a cat with a bell around my neck announcing my arrival, I made my way down the corridor passing room 407. The room was empty. Tonight 407 would not sing me my nightly lullaby of moans and groans. "May the Gods bless you." I whispered as I passed by the barren room. "Now your suffering is finally over." Anywhere would be better than being in the fall-

out of the fourth floor. Maybe tonight will be more peaceful knowing I wouldn't have to listen to number 407 bed one.

Pausing in the doorway before entering Marilyn's room, the smell of death created a barrier difficult for me to cross. First I needed to survey the situation and gather my courage before I could enter the room.

Looking into the bed next to her, I found it was empty again. Next, I looked at my withering mother-in-law restrained to her bed like a wild animal. It is hospital policy for patients to be kept in a restraint when no one was there to make sure they don't climb out of their bed or pull out their I.V.'s. Morphine alters the mind, you know.

As a family we tried to never leave Marilyn alone. Although she had slipped into a coma, we were afraid that she would get scared if she would awaken and find out she was tied in her bed. Checking the bags of medication that hung from the metal poles attached to her bed, I discovered that the bag of Morphine was empty. I reached for the call button and pressed it. A few minutes later a snotty nurse answered, "Can I help you?"

"Marilyn's morphine has run out. Could you please send in her nurse with her pain medication? Thank you."

"She will be there in a minute, Marilyn's nurse is in with another patient right now." She said. I had to remind myself that she probably has to be that way to come to work every day and watch people die. Otherwise, I might say something nasty.

Walking around to each side of the bed, I removed the restraints. When she was free I bent over the edge of the bed and gently kissed her on the soft skin of her cheek, being careful not to awaken her. I didn't want to disturb the only real relief she had from her pain. I sat quietly watching her frail chest rising and falling. There were only two sounds filling the room. The hiss of oxygen escaping from the tube in her nose and the deep rattle that slowly clicked as air tried to escape her dry throat. This is what the nurses call "The Death Rattle."

After sitting there awhile I noticed that I was mimicking her breathing patterns. I found myself holding my breath along with her. She would breathe long and shallow, so did I. Epiphany came over me as I discovered I was only breathing when she was breathing. This was crazy. I couldn't remember how to breathe normally. My mind screamed out breathe, breathe, and she finally would. There would be a long time between each breath. One thousand one, one thousand two, I thought it was her last breath. One thousand seven, one thousand eight, I better call the nurse!

Each night that I would sit with her, I would pray that every breath she took would be her last. At one point I even stood over my dying friend with a pillow gripping it on either side. Standing next to her, I wondered how much strength was left in her empty shell of a body. Was her spirit still in there? I contemplated if she would even want to fight the inevitable. Maybe I was supposed to help her. Wouldn't she willingly embrace the light? Wasn't she a good Catholic? Hadn't she been preparing her soul for years? I would be doing her a favor, ending her suffering. Did I love her enough to let her go? There are delivery room nurses that help babies into the world. Why isn't there a nurse to help you out? I took a step closer, the pillow still gripped in my hand. Marilyn's eyes flickered open. "I love you Lauren. You're a good daughter-in-law."

Untitled

Christina D. Gowdy

Everytime I see your eyes glance over I smile
I catch myself gazing at you for a while
I know we're great friends
And I don't want any of it to end
But when I look at you I start to dream
Of what I want and what it all means
You may not even feel the same way
But I only want to hear what you have to say
From here I don't know where to go
I don't know if I should let my feelings show
What happens if we feel the same
Should I just accept the blame
Of a lonely heart who is lost
And wondering what love will cost?

Thoughts That Roam the Mind After the Coffee Pot Ran Dry

Daveron Hargis

Thoughts had at 3 a.m.

I was looking at myself in a mirror one day.
If I stood at the right angle,
it looked as if I had a chest,
instead of two pieces of fat
with a nipple attached.
Maybe I need to clean that mirror?

Thoughts had at 4 a.m.

If the world is just a mass of molecules,
and there is no true line between our molecules
and the rest of the universe,
and the molecules are just energy,
which is what our thoughts are.
Then why do our bodies grow old
and die? Or more importantly,
why do I not look like Mel Gibson?

Thoughts had at 5 a.m.

If God was and is all things then God must
have a sense of humor. After all if the jokes
are meant for Him then the punch lines will
go over our heads. That is the Divine comedy.

Thought had at 6 a.m.

Why do stupid people breathe?

Thoughts had at 7 a.m.

Damn the morning birds!
Their songs keep me up and make me see that
I have not made any sense.
Damn the morning birds' songs!
IF they do not hush
it will be a mini-Thanksgiving table setting
for them all.
Or better yet the smog
will take care of them.

The Stupid Action at 8 a.m.

I returned from the shower,
still groggy with out the morning cigarette
and coffee,
when I sat down I remembered
exactly where
I put my glasses. Never before had I seen
a more pathetic
ensemble of plastic and metal than the mass
that at one time were my glasses.
Then, while still in a morning grog,
I tried to bend the frame back into shape.
That is when I heard the sound
that I remembered,
the sound that accompanied the fact as to why
I had to replace the glasses before this pair.
I looked at the snapped metal,
that once were a pair of glasses,
and realized that
it was not Monday.
I need to get some sleep.

Always The Same
Mary Head

Some things will never change...
The mountain stream that won't stop flowing,
The sun that never ceases to rise.
The wind that somewhere is always blowing.
That haunting memory of your eyes.
The one true love that never dies.

Shattered
Mary Head

Like a shattered mirror,
My heart lies in pieces on the floor.
Not covered with blood from a cut hand or foot,
But flooded with tears that won't stop falling.

She
Mary Head

She sits staring off into space. She's been searching so long she can't remember when her search began. She's had love in her life, deep love, the kind people think lasts forever. But there is still that emptiness. It's like looking into a pool with a clear cover on it. She knows there is so much more, there has to be. Every now and then she scratches the surface, but can't seem to reach all the way into her soul. She is so filled with passion that it seems that sometimes she will explode. But that passion is well guarded. Although it cries to get out, to reach it's full potential, she won't let it go. She is withdrawn around other people. Some, like her significant other, seem to think they know her well. They think she is an open book. They think they know her better than she knows herself. But she isn't even sure she knows herself. Brought up on a house where she was taught to please, emotions, passions and rights as a person were set aside. If she puts her mind to it, she can convince everyone, even herself, that she has a perfect life. But the illusion never seem to last for to long. No one can say that she isn't dependable. Her kids will always come before anyone else, even herself. She was taught well. She takes on more responsibility at work than she needs to. She's taking classes at night, like she has time to. Searching for fulfillment, she strives to do everything well. Her heart cries out for the walls to come down. She'll keep trying. And someday she will be complete.

Death Dream
Dave Heckler

It always unfolds the same.

There is a throbbing in my head that brings tears to my eyes. I wake up and swallow hard, realizing my throat is sore. I am in bed, covers off me, trying to get my shirt to dry out. No hope for that.

My room is dark and there is something anesthetic about the air. Am I dreaming? I don't know yet. It's two o'clock in the morning.

I get up out of bed and grope my way in the darkness, trying to find my door. I could turn the light on, but I never do. I go out into the hall and step through the dark house, trying to make my way to the kitchen.

When I do get there, the first thing I always see is the mean red glare of digital clock above the stove. Sometimes I can stare at it for a while and actually start to scare myself. But in this situation I always seem to ignore the clock because it always feels as though I'm walking through a haze. I slid up to the refrigerator and open it, causing temporary blindness as the light inside illuminates groceries on the top shelf.

I always grab the bottle of water and take a swig right from the bottle. Just one, though. Then I put

it back, close the door, and make my way back through the field of darkness.

By the time I get back to my room, the anesthetic feel in the air is thicker, I close the door behind and step in the darkness back to my bed.

Before I get to my bed I smell flowers in the air. The funeral flowers. The ones that were on top of Dad's coffin at his wake. The nightmare is back. I know what comes next - I've had this dream before. I know what comes next and I dread it. I always dread what comes next, but I always go through it anyway.

I climb into my bed and the smell of the flowers is worse now. I can feel the weight in the bed. I know he is next to me. I roll over to look at him and no matter how dark it is I can always see him.

I can always see the pale white skin that looks like a white shell. I can always see the wiry hair that the mortician did not comb the right way. I can see the blue suit, I can see his lips sown shut and covered with wax. I can see his eyes and they look as if they've been glued shut. I come to the realization that I'm laying next to my dead father.

I'm horrified-by both his presence and by the smell of the flowers. My mouth is open-my lips trying to form the scream that is stuck in my throat. I feel powerless. And yet I reach out to touch one of his hands that are clasped together at his waist. My fingers touch one of the hands which is heavily coated with mortician's wax. The hand is so cold and stiff. I know that it is all built upon my urge to touch his hand at his funeral. An urge which I could not bring myself to act upon. I could never bring myself to touch a dead person. So I never got to kiss him good-bye either. But in the dream I always get my chance. And in the dream he is never in the coffin. He's in bed next to me.

So I put my hand on his and I tell him I miss him. I tell him I loved him. And then I always wake up.

Why Do You Want to Know Me?

Dave Heckler

I see you lying in my bed and I wonder-
Why do you want to know me?
Last night we stayed up and drank vodka
And watched TV.
We scrambled on the TV for things to watch-
Both too nervous.
The TV was an easier thing to pay attention to,
Than the sounds of our beating hearts.
You - you were very nervous,
And so was I.
I turned and faced you,
You turned and faced me.
We touched legs,
But were both too nervous
    to make the first move.
So we just slept.
We slept next to each other-hearts beating fast.

So now this morning I see you
    sleeping in my bed,
and I wonder,
Why do you want to know me?
Are you too good to be true?
You said you want someone
    who is trustworthy.
Well, here I am.
I am skipping school today to be with you.
And I'll skip it any other day if it means,
I'll be with you.

Let me into you world,
I really want to be a part of you.
Could I have you?
I don't know.
It's possible.

I want to spend time with you
And if we do this again-
staying up,

talking,
drinking vodka.
I'm sure we'll fall asleep together again.
And then I'll wake up in the morning
and see you,
lying in my bed.
And wonder-
Why do you want to know me?

I Remember

Dave Heckler

As I sit here
Alone
I look around me,
And see that you're not here.
I feel
Deserted.
You are,
Absent-from me,
Don't you remember when,
You were just like me,
Right now?
I remember.
Don't you remember when
You got depressed,
And drank
While spilling out your sorrows,
To me and me only?
I remember.
Don't you remember when
We were inseparable?
When I was the one you visited?
I remember.
You don't seem to, but
I remember.
I always remember.
I remember everything.
I remember always.

Anticipation

Dave Heckler

When I saw you that day,
I thought you were okay.
But as time passed,
And my feelings grew stronger.
The minutes before,
I saw you.
My heart palpitated.
My palms sweated.
And my head,
Spun around.
Like a merry-go-round.
Out of control.
Anticipation filled me.
The closer I got to you.
As I neared you,
I could hear my heart,
Jump out and scream,
Like a cheetah.
You smiled at me,
And I smiled back.
Now I dream of you.
Endlessly,
And all day.

Lonely

Jeff Hicks

Paige looks out silently.
The snow gathers on her windowsill.
Transfixion to the fallen crystalline,
echoing her own silence,
in honor of her presence.

Her fingers strokes the glass
drawing hearts and I love you's.
On the frost-tinged pane,

wondering,
if anyone loves her.

The snow continues to fall,
deeper into drifts.

She thinks of them as cotton balls,
but knows it's too cliche.
So she closes her curtains,
blocking the snowflakes from her mind
Hoping summer will be here soon.

Admirer

Jeff Hicks

I watched her at a distance.
Never interrupting,
nor with bad intention.

I knew her name.
And a little about her.
But not enough to lose the mystery.

So I watched her.
Quietly doing her task at hand,
subtle movements of her lips as if singing.

And wondered.
If she ever knew,
she had an admirer?

The Innocence of a Kitten

Colleen M. Lanigan

You said I had kitten eyes
All brown and innocent
You never wanted anyone to hurt them
You said my first coat of fur
was as soft as willow wisps in springtime
I was no bigger than the palm of your hand
when you first held me
and brought me into the place
of your beating heart

I breathed as you breathed
and together we slept
in each other
You promised to protect me
in all your worldly wisdom
a giant comfortable in the world

You left me that same day
orphaned in a wild city
ravaged with hunger and cold
scouring the alleys for love, food, shelter,
mostly love

I know these street well now
these corners, their shadowed walls
I have survived, found food and shelter
fought for it, even killed for it
but I have not found love

My fur is aged and dirty
my nails long and sharp
I scurry fast
pounce on prey
wound whatever comes near me

I wanted you to know
my eyes are black and narrowed
from too many dark nights
too many wanderings, looking for you
wondering all the time why you left me
why you killed my innocence

A Shrimp of a Story

Milly Laux

As I opened the door, an immense, brindle-colored dog stood eye to eye in my face. Running away, I looked back to see that the canine had disappeared. Simultaneously, a garage door, next to me, opened exposing a large silver bell that seemed to be on wheels, and contained a seat and steering wheel. Crawling through a window, I decided to take a spin, and was delighted to experience a jeep-like ride over the bumps of a freshly plowed field. Driving around a row of trees at the end of the field, there emerged the brightest sun of my experience, lowly, yet immovable and powerfully blinding me, but luckily the wind on the giant palm leaves soon blocked it. I impulsively, slowly stepped out of the vehicle to walk and explore.

The people were sitting at a picnic table, within the palm trees, eating a Hawaiian pig, even its eyes. Their own were bulging, and they clearly could see much farther that I could.

At their invitation to stay, I decided to, and I began to sit, when a huge eagle came soaring down and plucked me from my seat. Yet, he didn't seem to realize that he held me in his talons, so I decided to enjoy the scenic ride. The golds and greens were simply dazzling, as they changed shapes slowly, and as we altered our perspectives. The kaleidoscope was replaced by the undulating stripes of the small waves on the emerald water far below. Just then, suddenly the bird set me down, and gently patted and shaped me into his nest; then flew away. I popped myself out, but soon discovered that I was on the very top of an extremely tall skyscraper, without even a door, or elevator, or escape of any kind.

I took my magic marker from my pocket, and wrote messages for 'help' on my pink jacket, then tore it into pieces dropping one every few seconds over the side of the building. Momentarily, I noticed a gargantuan, gray net forming below. I removed my long green and blue plaid overskirt, pulled the drawstring waist together, and boldly jumped, holding the edges of my new plaid parachute. As I descended, closer and closer to the net, it abruptly disappeared. But just then, an unexpected squall jolted me sideways, and my feet caught ski-like on a store awning, taking me down a snowy mountain, and impetuously over the edge of a very sharp cliff, delivering me smoothly back into MY LAZY BOY CHAIR, where I promised myself to NEVER again eat shrimp dip at midnight!

The Zoo's Closing

Milly Laux

LOOK! LOOK!
THROUGH DARK, CROOKED BRANCHES,
THROUGH YELLOW AND GREEN TREES,
BY THE WATER, TOO.
NOISY EATING, LOUD TALKING.
MOTHER AND BABY,
THE YOUNG ONE YAWNING.
WANTING TO LEAVE SOON!
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

LOOK! LOOK!
THROUGH ROUND METAL BARS,
THROUGH SQUARE ONES, SILVER
    AND BLACK,
EYE TO EYE, STARING AND BLINKING,
NERVOUS, CALM, ANGRY,
NOW, LAUGHING AND DRINKING,
HAPPY, SAD, FULL OF FEAR.

WHAT IS THAT ONE THINKING?
THE LARGE MALE PACING.
WHY ARE WE HERE?

LOOK! LOOK!
THROUGH SMUDGED GLASS
    AND PLASTIC SMEARED,
NEVER THE PALMS OF JUNGLE DOME,
OLDER ONES ROAM.
YOUNG ADULTS COURTING,
COMBING AND PREENING.
INFANTS CLOWNING AND SCREAMING.
SEEM TO FEEL ANGUISH
    AND BOREDOM.
THE ZOO'S CLOSING,
NOW,
THE ANIMALS
ARE ALL GOING HOME.

Hard Candy

Milly Laux

Don't recall much about Grandma,
don't remember her too well, at all,
not a lot of outward emotion revealed,
she died when I was fourteen, that fall.
Just remember that look, and
the hard candy she gave us,
and the twinkle in her eye, then.

Seem to remember a lot of busyness,
three single men boarders, like her children,
she'd already raised eleven.
"Two had passed to heaven,"
she'd say, "the other nine married."
Remember the quiet as she read from the Book,
and remember that other look,
disapproval, fifty of us grandchildren hated it.
But, everyone remembers too,
    the twinkling eyes,
and the hard candy they would get.

Almost forty years later, now,
not a lot that I recall,
yet, my mind revokes somehow,
that precious gift she endowed.
I think of Grandma every once in a while,
that hard candy, and that twinkly eye smile.
I remember that hard candy she gave us;
    and I...
surely recall... that twinkle in her eye.

"The Bees Knees"

Delores Lee

Zoey woke up with a start. She'd had a bad dream. She dreamt her dog Gunner had gotten into Mrs. Chill's vegetable garden. Mrs. Chill looked different in the dream. She had a mole on the side of her cheek with a hair growing out of it.

She grabbed at Zoey's hair. Zoey screamed, but there was no sound coming from her lips. She woke up and lay there for a while looking for the familiar things around her.

She saw her books. Hans Brinker, Heidi, Charlotte's Web. All her friends were there. Her dolls were sitting on the shelf. She saw her little rocking chair with her baby blanket laying over the back. She wanted to rock in her chair, hold her

"banky" and suck her thumb again. But she was a big girl now. Six years old. All grown up.

She heard the birds chirping and singing.

"That must be the Bob White. Hear it saying "Bob White-Bob White." She remembered sitting outside one evening with her father. He told her all about the Bob White.

Watching the birds fly from one tree to another she wondered, what would it be like to fly?

As if she was awakened a second time she became aware of the pungent, spicy smell of cinnamon and maple. "Oh boy, french toast."

She heard her parents talking in the kitchen. Daddy was getting ready to go to work.

"Don't let the kids play in the sun too long. It's going to be a hot one today. That Zoey gets to playing and forgets how hot it is."

"I'll watch out for her. Don't worry, Dad. Get going. Mom said.

"Okay I'm going now." He rubbed his hand over his mouth as if to throw her a kiss.

Zoey walked into the kitchen. Her mother was reading the newspaper and drinking her coffee. She crawled onto her mother's lap. Then came the hugs, the kisses and the warmth of her mothers love. This was a special time for both of them.

"Would you like some breakfast, Dear?"

She rubbed her eyes and shook her head.

"You're playing games with me again, aren't you?"

She laughed and slid off her mother's lap. She walked around the table, giggled, and then said "Yes."

While her mother was making her breakfast Zoey asked, "How do birds fly, mom?"

"They have wings dear."

"Why don't we have wings?"

"Well, in a way we do, sort of. Not like birds though."

"Where are our wings?"

Her mother rubbed her little shoulders and then touched the small bones in her upper back.

"These are your wings. I think many years ago everyone had wings. And then as we grew and changed our wings were clipped and humans couldn't fly any more."

Zoey didn't quite grasp what her mother was saying. All she could think about was how she could fly. "Do you think I could fly mom?"

"No." Her mom said. "I think walking and running is about all we humans can handle. Maybe some day we will all take a trip and fly in one of those big airplanes. Would you like that?"

Zoey nodded while she ate her french toast and drank her milk. "This is good, Mom." She slid off her chair and went out on the porch.

"What are you going to do today?" Her mother asked. "Dad doesn't want you playing outside to long. It's going to get real hot. Maybe we will sleep out on the porch tonight. Would you like that?"

"Uh-huh." She was stilling thinking about flying. Watching the birds she wondered if the mama bird tells her babies not to play to hard. And if she scolds them if they are bad.

"Mom. I'm going over to Que's house."

"Alright, Dear. I'm going to do some washing now. With all this hot weather we've got a lot of laundry this week. I'll be in the basement if you need me."

Que was Zoey's friend. They lived next door to each other. She walked on the porch, looked in the called Que. "Can you come out to play?"

She came to the door. She looked like she just got up, Zoey thought.

Then Que asked, "What do you want to do today?"

"I don't know."

"Okay, I'll be out."

Zoey sat on the steps, waiting, when she came out she had a piece of bread with real butter on it. Zoey's family had real butter only when company came or if there was a funeral. She leaned over to smell the real butter. Que held the bread closer to her so she could smell it.

They sat there for a while. Not saying much. Que eating and Zoey smelling. Then she asked, "Do you think we could fly like the birds do, Que?" She stopped eating and giggled.

"Well-l-l." Que though for a while. "I don't know."

Now they were whispering. They both remembered seeing someone flying in a book they read. She had an umbrella.

"That's how we can do it. We've got to find a big umbrella."

"Sh-h-h. Don't talk so loud." They knew their parents would object if they found out.

"What are you kids doing out there? You're awfully quiet."

"Nothing, Mom. We're trying to think of something to do."

"Who has a big umbrella?" She whispered.

The Willis's, Que's parents, had a boarder for many years. Angelo Fonteccio. He was a rolley-polley man. The music instructor at the high school. He walked out of the house and looked at them, nodded and said "Good morning."

Zoey said, "I don't think he likes kids. Maybe because he doesn't have any kids of his own."

But maybe he has an umbrella.

They went inside the house and as they were about to sneak into his room Mrs. Willis called out, "Que, Grammas on the phone. She wants to say hello to you." Zoey went home.

A few hours later Que was outside calling Zoey. They sat on the porch, elbows on their knees and chin cupped in their hands. Back and forth their knees would sway. Zoey heard her mother washing in the basement. Then she remembered the closet in the basement.

They waited for her mother to go outside to hang the clothes up. When they heard the back door slam they knew she was gone, and they crept down the stairs and went directly to the closet. They opened the door, looked around, and there tucked in the corner was big black umbrella. It had a handle like a walking cane. It curved at the top. They hurried up the steps and out the front door. Their bodies trembling with excitement.

Now they had to find a place to jump from. It had to be high but not to high. After all they had to reach it. They were crossing the yard and saw the porch. Que's porch. It wasn't screened in and it had a high ledge all around it.

"You can help me." Zoey said to Que. "Okay."

They took a chair and pushed it next to the ledge. Zoey climbed up and Que handed her the umbrella. She opened the umbrella, looked down and thought of the birds she watched. As she was starting to jump down, she heard a scream. It was her mother. To late. Zoey was flying.

She landed with a THUD. "Ouch," she said. The umbrella turned inside out and her feet were hurting. She laid there for a few seconds.

Her mother was there by now. "Are you alright?" She kept asking. Still a little stunned she opened her eyes and reassured her mother she was alright. She saw the tears in her mothers eyes and said "Don't cry, Mommy." Now Que's mother was standing over her. "Is she alright?" Mrs. Willis asked. "I think so."

Que's mother took her by the hand and marched her into the house.

"She's going to get a spanking, isn't she Mom."

"Yes, Que, and you should get one too. What possessed you to do something like that?" She couldn't answer her.

Zoey was very happy that her parents decided a long time ago not to spank the children. Mom always said, "Men don't know their own strength." Our punishment was having to give up something we wanted. If something was planned we couldn't go. She could hear Que crying.

As her mother was cleaning her cuts on her knees she noticed the scars Zoey had. Zoey's head was always two steps ahead of her feet. Causing her to fall. Her left foot turned in a little. Whenever she tried keeping up with the older kids she ended up falling.

After she finished she looked at her little daughter. She had an overwhelming desire to hold this and hold her tight. She wrapped her arms around

her and held her a little longer this time.

"Zoey, you are my "BEES KNEES."

She would remember that moment for many years to come. She never knew what it meant but it was her and her mothers special name.

Now she had to take a nap. That was her punishment. As she was falling asleep she didn't hear the birds anymore. He feet hurt her. Her thumb slowly came up to her mouth and she wondered what she would do tomorrow.

"I guess I'll make mud pies."

The Chickadee and the Puff Adder

Amy Lingafelter

Elizabeth, my friend to beat all friends,
calls me at Thanksgiving with a

"Hey Chickadee,
Today's topic is me."

And I am the baby chicken,
flightless chickadee,
watching a parade of
LSD dropping, cheap beer swilling boys
my friend, so naive, leads.

My other friend to beat all friends,
beaten, Emily could not
even chip in $2.75 for a birthday present
of strawberry bubble bath
(even though she signed the card)
presented to me by Elizabeth
(who paid for the damn bubble bath
and the card)
in a restaurant booth.

They conspire across the table
over pie they will not eat.
Emily and Elizabeth are together
in the well heated college dormitories
of America
testing the limits of Catholicism
and their sexualities.
To learn about them at the restaurant
I whine about Thanksgiving, my family,
and sex-
3 topics that certainly don't fair well over
temporary raspberry pie,
tea that's too hot to drink,
and some waiter we remembered
from high school.

My "woman friends"
(that I'm apparently old enough to have now)
condescendingly explain their lives to me,
and I regretfully keep from them
my most wonderful feat-
overcoming my fear of puff adders
by studying pictures of snakes
in the "S" encyclopedia
every day since they've been gone.

But I have sent this in birthday cards and letters
lost in college mail.
And I have sat in many a restaurant booth.

I always end up returning home
after we do late nights (well, late for me).
I slip cautiously into bed.
Far under the covers, at the end of the bed
a puff adder-
a short, very poisonous and deadly snake
found all over Africa-
waits to bite my toes.

It's not really Thanksgiving today.
It's any day, between deep conversations
every holiday.
It's any day.
Yes, I am the chickadee.
I already know what today's topic will be.

1/2 WAY

Amy Lingafelter

There is a mormon man named Matthew who lives in New Orleans and is thinking about me this instant.

I met him halfway in Memphis on the sidewalk in front of Graceland, and we wrote Elvis a note in black marker on the grounds:

Elvis,
We met halfway because of you. "We're caught in a trap." Love, Two people that barely know each other.

Matthew left me at the gate of Graceland, and we communicated vaguely through letters. He tried to convince me of Jesus, but I don't think Matthew's a real Mormon because he's not out of place in the den of sin, New Orleans, Fat Tuesday. And he was born in Colorado, close to Utah but no cigar. And all those other rumors about Mormons...

And though he only knew me long enough to get my middle west address, he loves me and he'll send for me as soon as he gets back from Brazil.

Another interesting part of being a Mormon,
Matthew's attempting to convert Brazilians.

Perhaps he hears that voice I hear across the night Memphis, Chicago, Brazilian sky.

Elvis whispering, snarling, deep and echoing off the stars

"nothing will ever be the same again" (add 'baby' here for Elvis effect)

Now where did Elvis come up with that?

And in my letters I tell Matthew that I am not a real Mormon or even a fake one. I don't believe in Jesus Christ, but the other men in my life are a great source of amusement to me.

I can't break it to Matthew that I would rather not be sent for by a Mormon from New Orleans that I barely even know.

And I've got enough problems already.

Actually there are so many other men I'd rather meet in Memphis, around the block from strip clubs on fast and commercial streets,

with Elvis whispering to me in the sky
pushing me home to the middle west
and letters stamped from Sao Paulo, Brazil
recruiting Spaniards from Catholicism
for the Church of Latter Day Saints.

"I've got enough to worry about."
Mormons and long distance relationships.

Funny who I'd meet there, not Elvis,
but a Mormon named Matthew, and I can't remember what he looks like

to save my soul

but in front of Graceland we both agreed that "Devil in Disguise" is the best.

However, Elvis chooses to whisper to me at night

"nothing will ever be the same again."

a voice heard by men every where
not just ones oddly stumbled upon in Memphis, Tennessee

Elvis' home, half way

half way.

Back?!
Jenna Lockwood

You walk into the room
and I begin to cry.
You begin to approach me
and ask me why.

Why I am so upset
I cannot explain.
That in my heart.
You left great pain.

So please don't ask questions,
I don't want you to stay.
Don't want you to see me,
When I'm acting this way.

How can I say to you
You made me ruin.
How do I say to you that
I've had too much fun?!

Reflections
Jenna Lockwood

I didn't want to write poems
anymore.
Sitting on my bed hugging my
Teddy bear. I stared down at the
floor of my room, filled with poems.
Sentences.
Private thoughts.
That I, at least at that time,
Thought I had no use for.
Some of the poems were of him.
Some of smiles, flowers.
Sunsets, and other beautiful scenes.
And some how, for some reason,
I didn't feel the way I did when I
was younger.
Ya know, happier!
Well, I guess things change, right?
I looked into the mirror. Which hung
onto my wall.
It threw back a reflection.
A reflection of a woman who had
changed.
At that moment, I picked up my
brush and began to paint.

Things That Go Burp in the Night
Bob Loewe

Chapter One: Starting Over

Davigan smiled as he chased round the patterns of red-brown wood grain swirls, the bar rag almost a living creature stalking elusive dirt and grime. His eyes focused somewhere deep into the grain, watching the day he set the top replay.

It actually started out life in a cherry orchard, becoming a banquet table, and a surgeon's table, before its latest incarnation as the bar in Davigan's Inn. Aggie was born on the boards. We've all bled on them. Grebbel died on them, but that is one of Davigan's open secrets, "Boy, it'd be bad for business to have every rickety little wizen ale guzzler know that a thirteen hells demon bled on these boards. They'd lose their appetites." I always tried to argue that it would be good for business, that people would come from miles around to stare at the top. But Davigan was never satisfied with that. "People come from miles around anyway. I've got the only Inn. Boy, you just don't tell anyone."

Instead of telling people about Davigan's demons, each patron was told that he might add his own swirl, of ale, or blood or bile, meat drippings or butter. Most swirls never last through the morning following their birth, when Davigan scrubs the whole bar down and rubs it with walnut oil. Some last years, but all combine and add until it appears you can reach down into the fabric of the wood with a quick hand and grasp a piece of lost youth, or pinch an often regretted mistake between a thumb and forefinger, pulling it out of history forever by ripping out a few splinters as you eat mutton and drink your wine. Most folks don't know which splinters to gouge, so they drink.

Davigan looked as if he was going to plunge his arm to the elbow, when Dracorn came stumbling through the door with rivulets of rheumy, gooey stuff running from his left eyehole. The eye was simply gone, with bits of semi-charred clear stuff where the eye used to be, and a little black stick poking out of the center. One side of his mouth had been slashed and left a track of dried blood. The rest of his mouth spouted an uninterrupted flow of profanity.

"Bartender! Damn! Lousy thief gets a guy drunk in the name of some kid's Crossing Ceremony so he can't even fend off a pickpocket. Davigan, you bastard, I've been waylaid, hornswoggled, robbed, butchered, beaten..."

"You forgot buggered," Davigan added.

"The damn thieves didn't have the guts!" Now that Dracorn had his head, he was absolutely blithering. "I was assassinated! They took everything worth anything! What are you gonna do about it, Mr. Constable?"

"Never mind that. Anything that can do this to him would fillet me and lay me out in the market at three coppers a pound." Davigan spoke to some unseen something in the bar top. He then turned to Dracorn, "I suppose the first thing I'm going to have to do is mop all this blood up off my tile."

The first thing he actually did was pinch a little sand between his fingers and mutter something. The next thing I knew, the pupil in Dracorn's good eye lost its remaining focus and he slumped into Davigan's arms.

The big man picked up Dracorn as if the wounded man were a child being carried to bed. But instead of a mattress, Dracorn was laid on the bar top. By now, Davigan had switched from muttering quietly, to mumbling loudly, "... cauterized mostly. A few burns and scrapes—nothing life threatening."

I figured that it was a good time to make my entrance. Well, it was really a rise. From the floor where I had collapsed the night before, I grabbed the edge of a table and heaved myself onto my feet, though I immediately regretted moving. "Mr. Davigan!" I began, but my tongue seemed tied into an old boot and little stockings were on all of my teeth.

As I was getting some water, Davigan managed to find a way to contain his merriment. "Did Dracorn wake you up, or have you suddenly become an early riser?"

"Actually, it was the cat marching by in hobnail boots. If this is what it's like to be a man, I'm going back to joyous youth."

"Well then, Boy run on along and get Brother Rasdanon."

When Davigan smiles a lot, I know its going to be a long day of grief. But then, he'd been calling me "Boy" so long, half the people in town thought it was my given name.

I didn't run along. I walked - carefully. The sunlight hurt. A minuscule dwarf sitting on my ear was mining my skull with a pick axe. But I didn't hurt enough that I failed to notice Davigan had already up a new door, or that Barles and Ran were lying in the splinters of the old one. I didn't stop to wonder what had happened. I knew that Davigan would tell us all, over and over and over again in that voice that's just a little too loud even when your head doesn't hurt.

About a dozen steps down the road, I realized it was late afternoon. People all over were showing the usual signs of the end of midday. Stornin's stumpy feet could be heard stumping around his

shop as he waited on people who had figured out they needed rope or tallow or something else before the sun went down. And Ginny was opening up her house, for the evening rush. The one factor that removed any lingering doubts that I had slept the morning away was that Davigan's granddaughter, Aggie, was wearing her afternoon hat while she sat at her accustomed place by the well. A big stack of huge waterskins to sell to the passing caravans and other assorted folks leaned against the well's masonry. Now, watching Aggie in her afternoon hat watch her grandchildren run around and insist on things, my thoughts turned to the summer when she was a child playing there.

It was another summer like this one, 97 years before, while the Crystal river was overflowing, sending spills and rivulets of water down the lower places and various courses throughout the Three Valleys, and Aggie, all of seven, was standing in front of Davigan and refusing to let him pass until he promised they could dig a well - never mind that it was the rainy season, or that the river channels through the town never dip so low that you can't throw a bucket in. Still, people, thirsty people, walk over the bridge to First Island and wait in line to drink from the well, rather that dip a cup in the river. There's no figuring people.

I stopped in front of Aggie to say something eminently profound, or at least to look that way. After all, by virtue of the Passing Ceremony the night before, I was now a man.

Aggie, acutely aware of the ceremony, now treated me as she treated all of the other sots. She dumped a bucket of water over my head.

I thanked her, and continued on my way.

About a dozen bare-bottomed kids sat on the lee side of the bridge with their legs in the water. The river was cresting, and the Midtown Channel slopped little waves over the bridge deck, wetting the feet of the unwary, and sending a ripple of laughter down the row of kids. Aggie was watching the whole scene very intently. It was either to make sure no one slipped any farther from her sense of propriety, or slipped off the bridge. Instead of staying to figure out which one was prevalent in her mind, I wiped my soaking head and tromped over the bridge in soaking boots towards the Temple of Gehgalgos.

I stopped at the Temple stairs to dry out. There is something inviting in the grey stone walls of the place. It's built a little like Davigan's Inn - the only other stone structure on the river. The rest of the buildings are of wood, with a good share of tents, and a lot of lean-to type structures constantly growing and dying on the south ends of the islands, and all along the banks.

The two biggest differences between the two buildings, are that the attachments built onto the inn were made of wood while the Temple expansions were all of stone. Also, the Inn has a mostly regular roof, while the roof of the Temple was modified somehow so that light comes bouncing down a series ducts to the inner sanctuary without letting the weather in. It's some kind of construction trick. If anyone crawled the ducts around, they could probably figure it out. The rest of us just enjoy it.

Dry to the point I was no longer dripping, I stepped through the door into the relative cool of the temple's interior. Thoughts from another time crept along the back of my skull, to the nights I'd wander in, still dripping from a midnight swim, and fall asleep on the tiled floor of the foyer. Brother Rasdanon always managed to find me there after his morning prayers. I should say, always managed to not find me there until...as he often stepped over me in the middle of the night while on some errand. I wondered for a second, whom he was stepping over now. But that didn't change the fact that someone had hurt my friend while he slept in the cave that I now called home.

"Brother Rasdanon!" No one answered my call, although there was a shift in the drapes that ran round the foyer, exposing a little foot belonging to the latest refugee from the heat. I pulled the curtain aside to find Tonny staring up at me, "Do you

know where Brother Rasdanon is?" He nodded. "Could you bring him to the Inn right away?" He nodded again and ran out the door.

He's a good kid, but he almost never speaks.

He's said maybe ten words since the day I found him up river, amidst the bodies of what I can only presume were his family. He never told us who they were. Now he is with us.

I lingered over the last breath of cooler air, and stepped back out into the heat. It would be so easy to hide out behind the curtains like Tonny. I told myself no one would miss me if I slipped in behind the folds and slept for a while. Then I shut my cerebral yap and didn't open it up again until I got back to the Inn.

Well, almost. I stopped briefly on the bridge and thought about kicking one particularly noisy kid into the river, just to see if the current would suck him down in a maelstrom of flailing arms and legs.

Tonny came running up as I thought, and through one of his amazing collections of nods, shrugs, faces, gestures, and expressions, he let me know that Brother Rasdanon was already inside. I just ruffled Tonny's hair a little, not wanting to break his silence, then slipped him a coin for a sweet bread. Little feet took off, with an unkept mane of hair trailing along like a wake in the air. He moves awfully fast for a waist high kid, little Tonny does.

I turned my attention to the bar's interior. The new door swung away nicely under the weight of my palm, and I saw a familiar stoop-shouldered figure standing, his practiced fingers tracing the gash running from Dracorn's eye, and murmuring something I didn't understand - but did recognize. Rasdanon murmurs. Davigan mutters. It's hard to tell the difference between the two forms of babbling; they often seem to be saying the same thing, but it sounds just a little different. Brother Rasdanon can say Gehgalgos correctly, Davigan's human tongue can't get all of the syllables and it comes out guttural.

When the tremolo stopped and he looked up at me, two words came out from between his lips, "Death Stick." I didn't know what he was talking about, but watched as he pulled tweezers from a pocket, and took careful hold of the black stick thing in Dracorn's eye. "Duck behind the bar," he said.

I ducked. After a few seconds I heard a grunt of exertion, then the thwunk of a heavy piece of wood hitting the floor, so I unducked. Lying at Brother Rasdanon's feet was a piece of black wood as big around as a man's wrist, and as long as his foreman, carved all over with glyphs and runes. One end was sharpened to a point. The other was slightly splintered as if hit with a mallet. It looked dead. Brother Rasdanon was back to murmuring. And flushing the eye socket with crystal vials of blue fluid from his bag. Pretty soon he stopped, pulled over one of the unbroken bar stools, and sat down.

Davigan's voice boomed from the residence door, "What happened? You hear about the crate of vials I got last night, and come to see if you could beg them away from me? Or did you decide that if you healed Dracorn, I would be indebted and give them to you?"

"Neither!" Brother Rasdanon replied as the corners of his lips began to twist upward. "I was thirsty and knew I could never get served with this slab of meat covering the bar."

"I am not a slab! I am a 'select cut'." After a pause, in which nobody laughed, Dracorn added, "I am a thirsty 'select cut'." Then everybody broke up.

Since Dracorn was still lying on the bar, Davigan poured a whole vial of nasty green stuff into Dracorn's open mouth, then slapped a free hand over it so he couldn't spit it out. After Dracorn swallowed several times, Davigan let go. He sat up on the bar, already a shade healthier, and cast a lone baleful eye at Davigan. "That was a vile way to get that stuff down me."

"If you'd just drink it like a normal folk I wouldn't have to be crafty." Davigan answered. "Now get your scaly ass off my bar, and tell me just why I am such a lousy host."

"I'll tell you in a minute." Dracorn was now testing Davigan's patience as he hopped off the bar, and picked up the stick. I decided to be patient, he was probably hung over too.

Davigan was not pacing the bar. "What band of idiots attacks a full blood dragon, in dragon form, while it's sleeping, and then doesn't have the collective good sense to make sure it's dead? Stupid! Might as well walk up to a hillman, pull his beard, and ask if you can wear his silly hat! Stupid!" Davigan was starting to hit his stride, "Nobody is that dumb. Nobody alive."

"Dav, that stick wasn't made for Dracorn." As Dav stopped to stare, Brother Rasdanon continued. "It was meant for a dragon about a third Dracorn's size."

"I know that!" Dracorn yelled back. "I'm in denial."

I was getting nervous, it seemed I was the only one who didn't know exactly what was going on. Up until then, the connection between where Dracorn spent the night and what happened to him I had considered to be a sign of my being a terrible host. My heart beat a little faster when Dracorn began to read the runes on eye spike, "... the beast of five fathers and no mother ... the nameless dragon..."

Now everybody was silent. All I could do was think about how I couldn't have pulled out the spike while in dragon form, and wouldn't have been given the opportunity to change to human while under attack. "Dracorn, I owe you an eye."

"You owe me a barrel of ale." Dracorn replied and began to grin. "The two fools coming down the road owe me an eye." His lips parted to show a full set of teeth. In any bodily form, few things in this world are more terrifying than Dracorn with an anticipatory smile. "They should be here in another couple of hours."

Davigan wasn't even pulsed, "And what were you doing while those TWO were traveling?"

"Enjoying unconsciousness. Ever try to fight when you were hung over?" Dracorn's last question drew appreciative groans from around the room. "Anyway, there were nine. Now there are two. I didn't want you to feel left out."

"Dracorn, it's so kind of you to always look out for a friends feelings. Like last night, when you graciously shattered that rotten old door into kindling for me."

"Actually, Barles and Ran kindled it for you. I just assisted," Dracorn's eye ran round the room. "Where are those two anyway?"

Untitled

Kelly Marasovich

A CHANGED PERSON MOVES
QUICKLY TOWARD HER.

A DIFFERENT LOOK IS PRESENT
IN THOSE WIDE OPENED EYES.

THINK FAST!!!
WHAT HAPPENED?!
WHAT WENT WRONG?!
HAS SHE DONE SOMETHING?!

NO EXPLANATION WILL BE ACCEPTED,
HIS VOICE DRONES ON AND ON.

THOUGHTS RACE
    THROUGH HER MIND...

NEXT TIME...I WILL SCREAM...
I WILL RUN... NEXT TIME...
I WELL YELL BACK; THESE THOUGHTS
TRAPPED INSIDE HER HEAD NEVER
ESCAPED HER LIPS.

AS USUAL, SHE IS SILENTLY STARING
STRAIGHT AHEAD...
...MOTIONLESS...
THEN, AS

QUICK AS LIGHTNING,
HER MOVEMENTS
BECOME AUTOMATIC.

HER BODY CURLS UP INTO A BALL, SHE
MOVES INTO A CORNER
WHILE HER ARMS
REACH UPWARD TO PROTECT
HER FACE.

NOBODY UNDERSTANDS IT,
BUT HOW CAN
THEY, WHEN SHE DOESN'T
UNDERSTAND
IT HERSELF.

EMOTIONS MIXED UP, FOR

HOW CAN IT BE—THAT THE SAME HAND
THAT CRASHES INTO HER FACE,
ALWAYS
ENDS UP TO BE THE SAME HAND
HOLDING
TIGHTLY TO HER OWN.

I, the Jaguar

Maria Mellinger

It was my first night as a headless woman. Things were going well. I wore my junior prom dress from high school with plenty of fake jewels. The makeup artist stuffed my bra with great success. The neck brace I wore was fitted with an alligator broach and the black mask hiding my head worked like a charm.

For thirty-five cents, children from Central Florida could peek into my cage. "Hollywood Starlet Decapitated in Hideous Jaguar Accident," the fake headlines outside the tent read. Most of the kids didn't realize that a jaguar was also a car and so threw up their quarters like so much cotton candy on the ride home, dreaming of a great bloody woman with a neck stump and a claw caught in her throat.

"Forced to Live Life Without a Head." For that realistic touch, an IV and fake oxygen tubes were attached to the neck brace. Hospital signs adorned the walls around my wheelchair. "No smoking. Oxygen in Use."

The first couple to see me were, my guess, from a trailer park in Southern Illinois or maybe Kentucky. "I saw this in The National Inquirer, Baby, I swear to God I did. Poor thing. How ya suppose she sneezes?"

"Lady ain't likely to get colds, Mama," answered the man. "No boogers, neither."

Next came hoards of children. Some gasped, turned white, and ran for their mothers. Others poked their fingers through the bars, not believing I was real. "She's a Muppet," yelled one. "Jim Henson's in there somewhere."

"She can't talk 'cause she'd sound like Kermit," agreed another.

The more investigative of the children played a clever game of Clue, staking out the single wall of bars, trying to see from an angle impossible because of the black curtains and hospital machinery. They would make loud noises, but I had been trained not to hear. They would spit, but I would pay no mind until a great gob of Bubble Yum smacked my skin, then I would brush it away. They would wave, and I would remember my teacher's words: "Never wave back. Ya wave and they know ya got eyes. Ya sit there and they think, 'Damn, she really ain't got no head'."

At eight o'clock the exhibit closed for half an hour. "Nurse's orders," was the given excuse. I pulled off my black mask, changed, and traveled the fair incognito as myself. I ate a chili dog, won

a bullfrog, and saw the World's Largest Rat-a wombat with a tall epoxies on.

Over by the elephant ears and cold beers stand stood the most beautiful man I'd ever seen. His hair was light brown, like a funnel cake, and sprinkled with gray like powdered sugar. His hands were large and strong; I just knew he could take aim at any object in the shooting gallery and never miss the mark. He had a nice butt, too.

We stared at each other, like Cinderella and her prince. It was fairy tale love, the kind that can only happen at a carnival.

My watch beeped and I knew I had to leave him. I turned to run, hoping my glass slipper would fall off in his path, forgetting I was wearing Converse. He followed for a few feet until a family returning triumphant from the goldfish games collided with him. I only loved him more as he stopped to pick up each floppy ten-cent fish that tried to swim on the hay-caked ground.

Minutes later I was headless again, behind the blackness. The children walked by. The tourists walked by. He walked by for a mere second, watching the headless Hollywood starlet, mourning the loss of her face as he mourned his lost love.

"Never wave..." I thought. "Ya wave and they know ya got eyes..." then he was gone.

Thank god for my mask. No one could see me crying.

A Jazz Musician or Enthusiast

Maria Mellinger

A cat takes tiny steps on the tightrope
    of neurons
stretched precariously throughout my brain.
He laps up a great puddle of serotonin and pops
lithium in petite capsules as if chewing a leaf
of catnip or spirit.

The Egyptians worshipped cats.
They gave them cream and kept them still
    in a pose
fit for a museum wall. They let them stretch
their fine bodies and delicately picked furballs

My kitten smitten
with depression and guilt lowers my lids like
window shades and naps. He is tired
    of treading
my emotions, my time, on tiptoes
while I continually worship the dogs.

Jesus Christ on Toast

Maria Mellinger

I met Jesus twice.

The first time, Bell had tried to kill herself by hanging from a curtain rod that could not hold her weight and sent the rod, the blinds, and the orange and green tie-dyed pareo with a salamander print that served as the curtain crashing to Raymon's feet. He left her despite the drama and majored in math. They put her in a place in town where she had been before. Jesus rode the exercise bicycle there.

"How do I know you're Jesus?" I asked during visiting hours.

"Because I can pedal really fast."

And he could.

"Can you prove it to me?"

He pedaled faster. I had meant prove Messiahhood, not "go speed racer." I clarified this with him. "I knew that," he said.

And he did. Jesus was a smart ass.

The second time, Steve took off his shoes and walked all night long. They found him when he walked into a 7-11 for Cheetos and No-Doz and left bloody footprints on the freshly mopped floor. They put him in a place outside of town where he

had never been before, but would have found if he kept walking. Jesus watched TV there. Oprah.

"How do I know you're Jesus?" I asked during visiting hours.

"I'm tired."

And he probably was.

"But you look different from the pictures. Different from the last time I talked to you."

"I am the Son of God," he said. "I may look different, but you still see me."

And I did.

Gardening with Kim

Maria Mellinger

"Plant sunflowers,"
She said. "Bury your budget,
Your materialistic goals,
Your house, your clothes, your car,
The kisses you buy with expensive female roles.
"Plant sunflowers
And grow with us."

Baltimore

Maria Mellinger

Aunt Barbara
Is the town hairdo.
She's teased, pleased, sprayed,
Bleached, blonde, praised,
Perfect.
We laugh at her,
With our ironed hair and
The part down the middle,
And know we'll be
Just like her someday.

Trepass

Bob Misiurewicz

Chapter One

After 14 years, the random jigsawed outline of scar tissue running like an opaque thread just under the skin was the only physical sign of the bullet wound that remained. The nick in my head where the skin had been gouged out was covered by hair and nearly forgotten. Standing in front of the mirror bare-chested; I rubbed my finger back and forth across the small raised mark on my shoulder, amazed that I was able to keep the truth, like these wounds hidden for so many years.

As a young boy, my Sunday afternoons were spent wandering the narrow, shaded deer paths that crisscrossed a tame piece of Virginia wilderness call Preacher's Woods, just outside of the town of Manassas. Nestled deep within this sprawling wooded expanse, was a place that stood like a silent monument to the unknown soldiers who died there. To the locals it was simply known as "the old grave yard." A crude sign fashioned from a piece of barnwood and hand painted bearing its formal name: "Soldiers Hill Cemetery," hung crooked from a dead Poplar tree at the edge of the secluded enclave. The long prairie grass that moved in waves like a dry green sea, occasionally exposed a lone wooden cross supported by a mound of stones.

A few yellow laurels grew like a wreath around the base, despite the dense foliage that threatened to choke them. There were no headstones, iron fences or any of the usual signs associated with a cemetery, just a half acre patch carved out among the trees and that solitary cross.

But legend said that men were buried there, casualties of the civil war. Nameless gray and blue infantrymen, long dead and buried below the cold, clay floor of this history rich landscape. Their voices; the wind and creaking tree branches, spoke to me in unfamiliar phrases, whispering age old secrets that only dead men understand.

Legends about the ghosts of dead soldiers; Rebs and Yanks, who stalked Preacher's Woods, grew as thick and colorful among local storytellers as the wild Spring Violets that dotted the clearings between the aged trees.

There were tales of phantom cavalrymen resurrected at sunset who wandered aimlessly, seeking an enemy 100 years gone. Eerie reports of voices and distant gunshots hears, even sightings of muzzle flashes at night, kept the myths alive for generations. For me, not easily influenced, I knew random rifle pops were those of poachers and small game hunters, not spooks or disembodied spirits. And the sound of voices was the breathy evening wind that wiled through trees, calling out the seducing those with vulnerable imaginations.

Along the trails lined with Oak and Hickory trees old enough to have breathed the gun-powdered air from General Beauregard's own Confederate rifles, you could catch an occasional glimpse of Stillwater Creek. A mere trickle in some places, in others, water holes fifteen feet across and a yard deep formed, where wildlife would rest and sip along it's black mud and brown spotted stone banks. An old timer once told me that the mineral rich waterway meandered East and eventually bled into the Potomac near Quantico where it's diluted remnants flowed through Chesapeake Bay and on to the Atlantic Ocean. And when I would watch a stray leave fall and land on the wet route; catching the wind like a sail and disappear downstream, I thought about the blood of fallen men that oozed from wounds into this artery-like creek, and became homogeneous with the water. The water that moved forward today, just like it did a century ago in it's single-minded, flowed undistracted by the was scenes it reflected, and left behind.

A small rustic cabin at the edge of the woods was home to a harmless recluse by the name of Milam Henry. A self-appointed guardian and caretaker of the obscure battlefield cemetery and the surrounding woodlands. Milam was said to be 100 years old and son of John Jacob Henry: one of few black men to fight at the Battle of Bull Run. His father was said to have been shot there and later died from his wounds.

Milam was rarely seen but the smell of smoke from his wood stove that hung captive in the trees signaled his presence. The bluish-gray smog was like a cloud of lost souls hanging over the hills that he was known to patrol.

My boyhood expeditions were a safe game of make believe where in my head, cannons exploded and steel edged blades clashed around me as I stood brave and defiant against imaginary enemies. A crooked, barkless tree limb with a pocket knife lashed to its stub-end became a Springfield musket-rifle challenging waves of bayonet wielding troops who fell dead at my feet and disappeared as quick as I had invented them. If only I had a real gun I thought, peeling off the pocket knife from the tip of my harmless lumber weapon. Fat chance, I thought. The old man would never go for it. He was dead bent against guns.

My old man would say he didn't care much for guns. Oh yeah, he shot a few rabbits and pheasants in his time, on rare hunting trips with my uncle, Jack Gray. He kept an old faded photo, wrinkled and cracked of him and Uncle Jack holding up birds that they bagged on the fall weekend outing near Chantilly. Their facial expressions undecidedly stuck between arrogance and humility as they flaunted their kill for the camera.

Uncle Jack was the token sportsman of the family and a sharpshooter according to my old man. The story about how he downed two geese with a single shot, made more trips around the family dinner table than the turkey on Thanksgiving day. It was an amazing feat to say the least. The part of the story that was always conveniently omitted was that he took those bird illegally, out of season; while hunting deer on private property without permission.

Uncle Jack was a tall man with broad shoulders and a face that looked like it was carved out of stone with a dull chisel. His light brown whiskers that never seemed to get any longer or shorter, grew in little patches that made his face look like it was

always dirty. A flannel shirt and khaki pants drawn tight at the waist with a thick leather belt was like a uniform that he wore and made him look like a lumberjack. He quit school to work as a coal miner for a short time, down in Buchanan but didn't like to talk about it much. He never had much to say in fact, which gave some the impression that he was simple minded or just plain dumb. But what he lacked in academic education, he made up in toughness and his knowledge of the outdoors. His was wisdom deeper than the stacks of text books that he never had time for. With all of the sporting skills and abilities that he possessed though, he still had a weakness for bending the rules until they broke.

It may have been some kind of bizarre retribution or higher justice that caught up with him when he was accidentally shot and killed in a hunting accident. But that was another story, one that never made it to the dinner table. The whole incident and the circumstances surrounding what came to be known as "Uncle Jack's accident" was never really clear to me. My old man didn't talk about it but if the subject came up, he would side step it. It was as obvious as a dead plow horse on the living room floor that whatever happened to Uncle Jack was to remain a secret, for now at least.

Maybe it was his brother's death that gave rise to my old mans outspoken bias against owning a gun himself or allowing me even the notion of having one... "Too dangerous with a kid around the house," he would say or "You want to end up like your uncle?" in a quick and blunt bark of dismissal. Yet, over time, his staunch shield of refusal would become a thin veil of hypocrisy that even a fifteen year old kid could see through.

Our house; a 90 year old, white two story farmhouse set on five acres of Virginia countryside was home to me and Joe Gray, my dad who I liked to call "the old man." Mom died when I was four years old and two older brothers before me left home. Joe junior joined the army and Josh moved to Alaska to work the pipeline. We had very little family nearby except for my old Aunt Amelia and Uncle Floyd Hume and a few in-laws whom we saw only at weddings, funerals and on holidays.

The old man was born in Norfolk; the son of a shipbuilder. He moved North in 1956 to work at a paper mill near Fairfax where he met mom. They were married and made their home here.

It was warm that long Sunday afternoon in July and my patience was running short. The old man would go to church every Sunday but never made me go with him. I knew it was because he stopped at Black's tavern for a few beers on his was back. He would come home half drunk and full of the Holy Spirit each time and think I didn't know it. I couldn't leave the house until he got home; he was strict about that. So I passed the time wearing out the pages of a small collection of civil was picture books always daydreaming about weapons and battle.

The old man's bedroom was generally off limits but today I didn't care. I was bored to death and besides, he would never know I was there. The contrasting images of him praying at church and sitting at the bar passed in and out of my mind.

As I snooped around the room, I came across a few girly books that were stashed in his dresser along with an old tobacco pipe that I had never seen him smoke, a small prayer book and a collection of assorted nuts, bolts and coins that appeared to have been secretly breeding there for some time.

Running my hands between his neatly folded t-shirts and underwear searching for more unknown treasures, I felt the unmistakable hardness of steel against my fingers. Grasping it in my fist I removed what appeared to be a rifle bolt. Tucked away in the corner of the same drawer, a few loose bullets. Their brass cases were dull, probably hadn't been touched in years. "I knew it," I thought to myself. All of this time he professed the evils of firearms in the house and it's been here all of the time, hidden right under my nose. But where?

The prospect of finding the rest of the gun filled my mind with an unexpected sense of excitement. Thoughts of stealing away to Preachers Woods armed with a gun and the world of adventure that awaited made my heart race as the pace of my

search quickened. Pushing open his closet door, the hinges squeaked a rusty tune through the silence of the empty room. There, hung up tight against the backside of the door, covered by and old winter overcoat was the dusty old rifle. I pulled it out into the light where I could see the word Remington, etched in a metal plate on the side of the wooden stock.

The rifle, a relatively harmless 22 caliber rimfire plinker, felt good cradled in my arms. I ran my hand up and down the steel barrel and across the smooth wooden stock wiping the dust from the surface. The sun through the bedroom window that reflected softly off of the seasoned weapon triggered a mixed feeling of power and fear that froze me like a statue. Staring into the bedroom mirror, my reflection was perfectly framed and reminded me of an old photo that I had studied in one of my school books. A photo of a civil was soldier in a proud pose, his rifle strapped in leather across his shoulder with a tenuous smile that reminded me of Uncle Jack. I felt powerful for a moment knowing full well that the difference between life and death was a mere pull of the trigger for the poor soul that stood at the wrong end of the barrel...

As I studied the subtle details of the old weapon, it occurred to me that I had seen that gun before or one like it in a dream or a recurring nightmare as a kid. I laid it across the bed, knelt down on the floor and sunk my head into my hands. Reaching back in my mind trying to repaint the dreamy memory, it slowly came into focus. It was a vague recollection of crying in my sleep after each repeated episode.

I couldn't have been more than three years old at the time when I was ripped from my sleep by the sound of a struggle and breaking glass clanging like a fist full of loose change slammed against the kitchen floor downstairs. Undetected, I crawled down the short, dark flight of carpeted stairs and peeped under the door that separated the stairway from the kitchen. My heart raced until it was nearly stopped by the sight of a man with the barrel of a rifle thrust up against my mother's throat as she slumped helpless in the corner, choking. His face tensed with fierce anger; her eyes closed and painful. Her hands trying desperately to hold back the crushing force that his strong arms exerted that made her neck veins bulge. I ran back up to my bed covering my head with my pillow and my ears with my hands, humming a drone pitch to block out the horrible, muted sounds that shrieked from the kitchen.

The excitement of my find was suddenly dulled by sad memories. Uneasy emotions pulled at my gut until I felt my stomach muscles cramp and my head get warm. I felt guilty for a moment but not sure why. I felt so helpless that I would wake up with a wet face sobbing.

He must have thought that he had the perfect hiding place for the gun. So good in fact, that he apparently never bothered to check to see if it had been moved or fired. Over the next few months, I routinely made off with it stealing away to Preachers Woods and returning it before it was missed.

I managed to get bullets from a farm kid down the road. Bought them cheap too. His old man always had a surplus of shells around. He sold me fifty for five bucks and he never knew they were gone.

Now, at last armed with a proper weapon, I hiked the same ridges and hills tracing the long eroded footprints of battle-weary soldiers; probably about my age I guess, but wise beyond my years in the ways of war and death.

The sights on that old Remington were a bit rusty and skewed just enough so that I had to compensate my aim by rolling it slightly to the right. I got pretty good at making that adjustment, the carcasses of dead squirrels and birds were proof of that. I would shoot them and leave them where they fell. Never did I feel guilty about killing a bird or animal. It's not like taking a man's life, I reasoned and the overwhelming sense of power and surge of adrenaline each time I pulled the trigger felt good as I landed lead in living flesh.

Always careful to get home before the old man did, I was a pretty good judge of the time by the position of the sun in the west. But I always found time for one more shot. Today the victim would be an unsuspecting woodchuck who was perched on a fallen dogwood trunk about 30 yards out. With it's fat furry neck centered in my sights, I felt my heart pound slightly knowing that he was mine.

His blunt snout puckering in the air told me that he sensed the impending danger but was helpless against it. My finger squeezed the trigger but before I heard the pop or felt the usual recoil, it was as if a bolt of lightning had blown a hole in the sky and I suddenly became the target as the frightened but unharmed marmot disappeared into the safety of the hollow stump.

The tree branches just above me exploded with a force that reduced them to sawdust. I felt a sharp sting in my shoulder and my face felt as if it had been sprayed with a handful of sand. I've been shot, I thought to myself as I hit the ground. My mind was like a kaleidoscope of blurry images as I tumbled down the steep slope like a rag doll, helpless and gaining momentum. Finally coming to rest, I felt the sharp edge of a river rock against my head followed by a feeling of free-falling. My eyelids, like a camera shutter, blinked and snapped a grainy, out of focus photo of a person standing at the top of the ridge, a haunting silhouette that chased me into unconsciousness.

Through the haze, the broad underbelly of a horse appeared and hovered over me as it vaulted the creek where I lay dazed and motionless, my mind trying desperately to unravel this sudden nightmare. Gunshots rang out between the frantic screams of charging foot-soldiers whose muddy leather boots stomped passed my head in a rush to meet an uncertain fate.

The deep thud of a distant cannon laid a deadly bass line for the snarled symphony of chaos that played in my ears. The smell of spent gunpowder filled the air.

The outline of a dark figure standing over me with an arm extended began to come into focus... I felt a hard pointed object poking me under the chin and at my ribs; a sword, I feared. It's sharp tip and edge inches from my chest. One accurately placed thrust of that blade and I would join the blanket of dead bodies that I imagined were surrounding me.

A low, graveled voice spewed the sounds of angry cryptic words that sounded like a fiery church sermon which penetrated my confused dream state. "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell," the voice cried as I started to regain my senses. The voice becoming clearer now, changed to a warmer but still urgent tone.

"Wake up boy. Get yourself up now, you hear?"

"Poachers. That's who fired on you boy. Your mighty lucky too, they usually kill what they aimin' at. They probably thought you was a deer. Damn poachers," he mumbled.

It was Milam Henry. His toothless and wrinkled-face smile was an odd but welcome sight in the wake of my tangled confusion. He had my rifle in his hand reaching out with it to help pull me up.

I felt a cold wetness on the back of my head. It was the creek. Looking down at my arm I saw blood now, but still too groggy to assess the damage, I grabbed the barrel of the gun as Milam pulled me to my feet. Again I felt the pain shoot down my arm. I opened my shirt which revealed a wound bleeding from my shoulder and running down my side. I felt a stinging pain in my head where I had landed against the rocks.

Holding my head with one hand and my other on my shoulder, I stumbled forward still a step or two behind Milam. "We'll get you all fixed up boy. You jus' follow me," he said.

The quarter mile hike to Milam's cabin seemed like a hundred and the smell of woodsmoke became stronger with each step until we arrived at his door.

Inside the one room shack, he sat me down in his only chair at a wobbly homemade table and said, "Now let's see what we got." Taking off my shirt, he washed away the blood and dirt from my

arm and shoulder and let out a muffled dog-breathed laugh. "You went and shot yourself boy, that's what you did. Must have ricocheted off a tree and came right back at ya'. Now we gonna pull that lead out, nothin' to it." Using the sharp tip of a hunting knife, he gently pried the half-embedded lead out of the skin and pressed a dry rag against the flesh wound. Soon the bleeding stopped.

Milam boiled the shirt in a bucket of soapy creekwater which caused some of the blood stains to fade, wrung it out and threw it across the room at me. "You get on home now, hear? Don't you come back here none neither!" He warned.

I limped home with the old Remington cinched under my left arm while pressing my right hand against my shoulder. It was nearly 5:00 p.m. and luckily, the old man wasn't home yet. I returned the rifle to it's hiding place as I had done so many times before and disposed of the other evidence of the day's events including the bloody shirt, all the time keeping Milam's rag bandage taped to my shoulder. Looking in the bathroom mirror, the red scratched where the tree branches had whipped my face were noticeable but fading. Splashing with water, I made off to my room hoping that when he got home, he would drop in his chair, turn on the TV and fall asleep like so many other Sunday afternoons. In the meantime, all I could do is wait and listen for the sound of popping gravel under his tires that had become a familiar sound as his car approached the house.

Divorce

Beata M. Parsons

Oh, the turn is coming up. About another mile or so. Hey! They put up a new convenience store. I wish they had put that up when, well, when it would have been a convenience for me. Shit, I had to go way across town when we needed groceries.

Hey, here's the street. Well, what do you know, they actually fixed the potholes. Amazing. Somebody must have bitched enough. I bet it was Old Lady Hubbard, no relations to the nursery rhyme. She doesn't even own a dog, only cats. Nineteen cats at that! Nineteen of those damn animals. She's a crazy old nag.

There it is...

I'll stop the truck here so that no one gets to wondering. It's a nosy block...

...Oh sorry...It's the blue house with the pink shutters. Renee made me paint them pink because it would make the house stand out. She said, "It will also give us something to embarrass the kids. Hee, hee, hee." Yeah...

...Sorry, I didn't mean to space out on you again. See that tree over by the fence? It's an apple tree. Renee had me plant that tree just after we bought the house. It was part of her fantasy, a blue house, white fence, and an apple tree. She is one of a kind.

Oh, hey, there are the kids! Damn, they seemed to have sprouted in the last year. Poor kids, its been real hard on them this past year. Jimmy was convinced that I was leaving because he broke the window playing baseball. It took a lot of counseling and talking to convince him that it was not his fault. Last I heard, he was doing alright. Look at him tossin' that ball around. He'll be in the big league one day. And little Jennifer. She's so small and young. She didn't really understand. She figured I was just going on a trip. Damn I miss them! They were all I ever worked for!

Hey there's George! Man, he's barely getting around nowadays, must be, hmmm, around ten years old now. I bought him as a puppy for Renee

on our first Christmas in the house 'cuz she was lonely with me working all those crazy hours. The guy claimed that he was a pedigree pure-bed. He was a purebred all right, a purebred chow hound! Ha! Ha! He's getting real gray around the muzzle and...

...There she is. Damn, she's beautiful. Just like the day we met. Her auburn hair, ocean blue eyes, hmmm, oh well. I wish I could have made her happy. Guess I just wasn't the one.

Oh, of course, there's good ol' Ted. Ink ain't even dry and he's already getting comfortable. That must be his sports car. How the hell can he afford one on his salary? Well, sure he can afford it! It's not like he's got a mortgage for a house he doesn't live in, or pay child support for kids he doesn't hardly get to see. Shit.

Let's get out of here. I've seen enough for today. Oh, don't worry, they won't recognize us. At least not in this old beat up truck and I'm sure they wouldn't even guess it's me under this beard and extra fifteen pounds. We'll just turn around in the Wilson's driveway.

They look happy, I guess, huh. Funny, a year ago that was my life, and now Ted has got the lead role. Shit, let's go get some beers...

"The Child of Light"

Chris Patton

The cold crisp mountain air surges through Scot's lungs. His heavy breathing drew it in sharply as he climbed the steep hill toward the object of the day's attention. He glanced up at he peak ahead of him to get an idea of any possible routes that could be taken to reach the top of this monster. The only sounds were the wind making its way up one side of the mountain and down the other, and the jingle of Scot's equipment as he took one labored step after another. "The Child of Light" was just ahead now, looming into the sky like a tyrant watching over his slaves. Scot's dream was to be the first to overcome this tyrant. Many climbers had tried this face, but so far none had beaten it. Without straining to think about it, Scot could think of at least eight people who were hospitalized, or even killed, by this beast. He didn't plan on being the next.

"Hey brainless. Wanna watch where you're going?"

The sound of a voice pulled Scot out of his thoughts fast enough to stop him from tripping over the rocks piled at his feet.

"How do you expect to ever make it up the big one if you almost kill yourself on the little ones?"

Scot smirked at his partner. Even though at times it seemed like his friend showed no mercy, he knew he was the best friend a guy could ever have. He was definitely the best climbing partner anyone could ask for. Three years back, he single handedly took the face of "Satan's Blight," a task that no one else has ever achieved. Scot was always amazed at how well his friend climbed, but even for Jeremy, "Satan's Blight" was way beyond what any man should been able to scale. In fact, Jeremy should probably be dead.

"Just wait a till we get on that rock. I'll be leaving you in the dirt, that's for sure," Scot shot back.

"In your dreams pal. But hey, I'll be a good sport. After I pass you up, I'll wait for you," Jeremy answered.

"Whatever. Where do you think we should start the climb?"

"What do you think would be the best spot?" Jeremy glanced back at Scot to see what he was thinking. It seemed like whenever Scot asked him a question, he'd respond with one of his own. And forget getting him to give you his opinion on climbing. He always let Scot make the moves and either backed him up to make it work, or prodded him to what might be a better way.

Scot glanced at the base of the peak, searching for a good spot. There seemed like only to possible places they could start from. One was a tree that apparently rotted a way and broken halfway up its trunk. The other was a pile of loose rocks that at one time shifted a little to much and ended up lying on Mother Earth instead of up on "The Child." Scot thought about it for a second, then suggested the boulders.

"Works for me," replied Jeremy.

Scot looked at his friend to try and read what that meant. It either meant that it was a good idea, or it wasn't what he would have done, but he'd make it work anyway. As it was, Scot couldn't tell.

They went over to the rocks and started setting up their climb. Jeremy took the harness gear from the pack he was carrying while Scot dumped his pack on the ground. After they both put their harnesses on, and the gear was secure, they paused to map out their climb.

"So what do ya' think?" Jeremy asked.

Scot took a second and tried to think out a good climbing strategy. He figured if they took it in five pitches, they could handle it. Now he just had to find four anchors on the side of the rock. "How about five pitches. Hundred foot climb, first, second, third, fourth, top," Scot suggested, pointing out the possible anchors he saw.

"Five pitches? Sure that's not to many?" Jeremy joked.

"Sorry I'm not a legend like you are." Scot replied.

"Hey, you know as well as I do that you're just as good a climber as me. And we both know this hill won't be any problem at all." If there was one thing Jeremy was good at, it was encouragement.

Deciding they had wasted enough time, Scot got to work setting up their supplies. He stooped down and spread out their gear to pick what they were going to need. Jeremy slipped out of his hiking boots and into his friction shoes, made exclusively for climbing. After they had both secured their harnesses, they loaded the gear Scot had chosen. Since the climb was so large, they had to watch there weight. Early on they could afford a few extra chocks, but halfway up they might have to lighten themselves. Each of them would start with four chocks. The ones Scot chose were a wedge and a cam. The wedge was called a Rock N' Roller due to the fact that it stuck in cracks in the rock and rolled around a bearing as the climber ascended past it. The cam was called a Technical Friend. These were also placed into cracks, but were better for a stationary climber to belay off of. Their plan was for Jeremy to climb halfway up the first pitch, then lock himself in and belay Scot past him to the first anchor. From there, Scot would belay Jeremy halfway to the second anchor, and so on until they reached the top. They had used this plan before, and called it switchover.

After one last check of the gear, they started. The first fifty feet weren't too bad, and Jeremy made his way up with ease. Once he was a little over halfway to the first anchor, he took out his Friend and locked himself into a secure horizontal crack. Then he took some rope and fed it through the belay system hooked onto the cam, sending out enough slack for it to reach Scot. Scot made a figure eight knot in his end of the rope and secured it to his harness. Getting ready to climb, he yelled up to his friend, "On belay!"

"Belay on!" Jeremy yelled back.

"Climbing," Scot yelled.

"Climb on," came the reply, and Scot started to climb to the first anchor. As Scot climbed up the face of the rock, Jeremy pulled in the slack on the rope, keeping him secure. As Scot passed Jeremy, he switched his belay over from an above belay to a below one and fed out a little rope as it was needed. At this point, a rope was connected to each of the climbers, and would be for the rest of the climb. If one fell, it was the other's duty to catch him.

As Scot reached the first anchor point, he looked for a deep enough crack to plant his Friend in. Once he found it, he secured himself to the rock, then switched his end rope over to a belay. As he did this, Jeremy switched his over to a figure eight knot to start climbing. Again the cries came out

from one climber to the other, only this time, reversed.

"On belay!" followed by, "Belay on!"

"Climbing!" followed by, "Climb on!"

Jeremy made his way up the second pitch, this time taking a little more time. Here the rocks were much smoother and even his shoes had a hard time gripping. He found a pretty long vertical crack and used it to make his way halfway to the second anchor. Again he secured himself and again the cries came out to start climbing.

Scot had seen how Jeremy had the vertical crack, and started there. Once he passed Jeremy he was on his own and had to search hard for good hand holds. Once they got past this pitch, they would have just about tied the record for distance. The first pitch had taken them about an hour and a half, so they had spent a little over two hours on "The Child" when the first problem hit.

One of the dangerous things about "The Child of Light" was the fact that nothing seemed to be able to survive around it. They had seen a good example of that with the rotted out tree at the base of the rock. Now, as Scot pressed on past Jeremy, he found that the rock too had begun to rot. The crack he was following started to give way under his hands forcing him off to the side to look for a better path. Just above and to the left was what appeared to be an outcropping just begging to be used as a hand hold. Scot slowly started to climb toward it. He positioned himself underneath it and reached out with his left hand and grabbed a hold of the protruding rock. He breathed a sigh of relief as he tested it and found it secure enough to climb with. From there, he made his way to the next anchor.

Now it was Jeremy's turn. They went through their routine and Jeremy started to make his way up to where Scot was. He climbed toward the rotted crack and followed it as far as he could manage. Once it became too hard to climb with, he made his way toward the outcropping. He reached out with his left hand and grabbed hold of the rock. As he pulled himself up to continue climbing, he was surprised as the ledge started moving. Before he knew it, the rock had broken away from the rock face and both him and the boulder were sent sailing through the air. He just barely got out of command "Falling!" as Scot locked off the belaying pulley. The sudden jolt of Jeremy's full weight sent Scot slamming into the cliff's edge, banging his head against the hard rock. The standard climber's helmet that Scot wore wasn't enough to block out the impact of the blow, and he felt darkness pull into the edges of his vision. Scot knew if he blacked out, he would lose hold of the rope and send Jeremy to his death. With desperate effort, Scot hung on to consciousness.

Jeremy, on the other hand, was even worse off than Scot. The rock that he had sent plummeting to earth had pinned his ankle between itself and the cliff before continuing on its journey. Jeremy's left foot slowly began to throb with pain as he jerked to a stop, hanging from the rope attached to Scot. Stopping for just an instant, Jeremy took in the situation. Quickly he found two good handholds, and one good foot hold, seeing that Scot wasn't going to be able to hang on much longer. Even if he were to fall unconscious, Scot would be safe. He was anchored to the rock, and wasn't going anywhere even if he did let go of everything. Jeremy, however, would be on a free climb if his belayer decided to fall asleep.

Not wasting any time, he started the painful climb to where Scot hung on. The only place for him to go was back over to the rotten crack in the side of the rock. It extended up to about where Scot was, with only about a twenty foot traverse to the left after he reached the top of it. He decided that even though it was rotted out, it was his only chance now that the ledge had put a hole where he was climbing. He started making his way up it. The pain in his foot flared up every time it touched the rock. He could tell that his ankle was broken, and this would probably be the last time he ever climbed on the side of a rock for the rest of his life.

The rock beneath him started to crumble as he

got further along the crack. He had to take more time with each move he made to find a spot that would last long enough for him to climb with. By this time, Scot had slipped into unconsciousness, and Jeremy was completely free to fall all the way to the ground. It was all to easy for him to imagine what the last foot of rope would look like as it slipped through the belay pulley and soared through the air to land on his mutilated body. He kept pushing those thoughts away as he strained on to where Scot was dangling.

He finally got level with Scot, and began traversing to where he was anchored. His left foot was completely useless now, and he had to rely on only two points of contact as he searched for more holds. Painfully, after what seemed like forever, Jeremy made it to where Scot was. He jammed one of his Friends into the rock and anchored himself in. Immediately he turned his attention to his friend. He looked over his wounds and was relieved to see that it wasn't serious. He had just suffered a hard blow, but no lacerations were on his head. He slowly brought Scot back to consciousness.

Scot came to and immediately realized what had happened. A surge of guilt filled him as he thought of his friend free climbing up the rotten stone to get to him. He was about ready to suggest the climb back to the base when Jeremy cut him off with his own plan.

"Here's what we do now. I'm going to stay anchored here and belay you to the top. We're high enough for this to be a safe belay anchor as long as you use your Friends as lock off points along the way. I'll give you my extra one too. I know you can do it."

"No. Absolutely not! You need to get off this rock and get your ankle looked at!" Scot replied.

"Not until you reach the top."

Scot looked into Jeremy's eyes and knew there was nothing he could do to change his friend's mind. He would have to get to the top before either one of them got off the rock alive. Jeremy handed over his remaining Friend and Scot prepared himself to start the most dangerous climb of his career.

From where the two were anchored, there was about three hundred feet of cliff left. They decided Scot would be safest if he locked himself through a Friend every seventy five feet or so. That way, if he fell he would be locked off by Jeremy, but would be suspended by whichever point he had passed most recently. With a painfully guilty feeling, Scot started the climb to the top. The first seventy five feet took about forty-five minutes. He found a spot to lock himself in and stopped to rest. He glanced back down to see how his friend was doing. He could tell he was in great pain, but was hanging in there. After a few moments, he continued to the next lock in point. He never made it.

Halfway to the next point, Scot found another reason why "The Child" was so hard to climb. He was reaching up to a small crevice when a sharp pain hit his fingers. He had just enough time to see the head of the serpent that bit him as it retreated into the rock. The surprise of the bite sent him off balance and sliding down the side of the rock face.

Jeremy saw Scot start to fall and locked off the rope. Even though the rope was locked, Scot would still have a heck of a fall until the last lock off point caught him. Briefly he wondered if he could hold the rope under the sudden impact of his friend's weight.

Scot sailed past the lock off point and breathed out sharply as his fall was cut short by the Friend. He thought he heard a faint click as he came to a stop, but the poison was taking its toll. He really couldn't tell what it was.

Jeremy winced as the rope jerked, then started to pull through his hands. His flesh was rubbed raw as he strained to hold the rope sliding through his fingers. Just when he thought he got a hold of it, he noticed that Scot wasn't all with it. To top all that off, it appeared as if the retaining wires in Scot's Friend had just snapped, giving him only moments until he went into another free fall.

Knowing he wouldn't have the strength to stop his friend's fall again, he decided to streak to desperate measures.

Scot was slipping to and from reality as the venom burned itself out in his blood. Fortunately it wasn't a fatal venom. He glanced to the side and saw Jeremy about ten feet away. He couldn't tell exactly what he was doing, but he looked like he was traversing towards him. He thought about it for a second, then threw the idea out realizing that Jeremy was anchored to "The Child." Again Scot heard another click, then a sudden yank. He looked up and noticed that this Friend wasn't holding too well with sudden added weight. The clicks he had heard were the retaining wires within the Friend snapping under the strain. Instantly he feared for his life. He knew he couldn't hold on to the rock in his present state. He was about to die.

Another jerk. Scot moved about five feet and then stopped. Fear shot through him, then he realized he hadn't moved five feet down, but five feet to the left. Fear was replaced by confusion when from somewhere he heard his friend talking.

"...Sco..Scot...I thin...think you might...need to... try this one some...other time...I don't...think we... made it..."

Scot tried to replay. He tried to say that it was okay. That they had their best, and had even set a new record. He tried, but nothing came out. His words were replaced with a gasp as he started falling. Downward at first, then to the side. Quickly he came to a rest, no more than teen feet from where he was. He glanced up to see himself locked in to where Jeremy had been, and his last sight before falling unconscious again was his long time friend slipping from his loose grip and falling past him to the foot of "The Child."

It took Scot three hours to get down from "The Child." He had never thought about trying to scale it again. He never even attempted climbing another face after that day. His guilt for what had happened stopped him from ever wanting to. He knew that Jeremy had given his anchor away by his own free will, but he still felt responsible. Despite his guilt, however, Scot never forgot what his friend gave up for him, and he knew that the price Jeremy paid, he had paid because he wanted to.

Wandering

Michael O'Brien

It's raining again and she's back
what is it about the rain that makes this so real?

Cute new shoes and crisp white socks
wandering—a wandering eye, mind, life

She's Italian, she's messy—
    stop thinking about her
but she's sitting right next to me
    chewing on her finger—
and I start wandering

She's an old infatuation born again
    with short dark hair
that curls around her ears
those, eyes, those same god damn eyes
    in another setting

Closer to me, closer to me

She just cleared her throat and glanced over
    to see what the
hell I was writing
When I'm alone I turn to brown eyes—
    dark brown eyes

Untitled
Lark Rains

When Thinking...Never Forget To

See Both Sides
See Both Sides

Untitled
Lark Rains

A Dictator Permeates his Subjects
He Reigns
Over All
Nature soaks her children
She Rains
Over All

Untitled
Lark Rains

Be neither
Two-faced
Nor
Crystal
Clear

As the Color Fades
Doug Rock

As the color fades from the most vibrant rose,
so fades my flower of youth.

As the color fades from the beautiful sunset,
so fades my own inner light.

As the color fades from the cherished photo,
so fade memories of us.

Beginnings
Doug Rock

Who knows when it starts
or where it will end
Joining of two hearts
...delicate to mend.

I like who I see
Tell her what I think?
How could she like me?
Away she will shrink...

I can see her soul
Deep within her eyes
But I guess my role
comes as a surprise.

I'll just do nothing...
just to wait and see
Friendship that I'll bring
Who knows what could be?

You make the first move
I hope I notice
There's nothing to prove
I think you know this...

Life Goes On

Doug Rock

We talked it all out, you tasted my tears
You let out your heart, I let out my fears
Life goes on when you're miles away,
...and I miss you...
Love goes on when you're mile away,
...nothing to do...
Even through it all, I kept my faith
My love is solid, not a thin wraith
If you feel yourself getting weak,
Take another piece of me.
Life goes on when you're miles away,
...and I miss you...
Love goes on when you're miles away,
...nothing to do...
...and all these days, I travel with you.

Meaning of Life

Doug Rock

There comes a time in your life when your beliefs and personal philosophies are tried. During these times, you must be true to yourself and to the ones you love. For, if you're not true to yourself, you are true to nothing; and if you're true to nothing, you are nothing.

Your beliefs and personal philosophies may or may not be proper, so always keep your ears open and listen to people. Don't say "This is my belief, agree with me or get out!!" Listen! It could be the most educational thing you can do.

If you have sufficient reason to decide that your beliefs and philosophy are wrong, then accept that fact and change them accordingly. Don't dwell on your past mistakes, accept them for what they are and go on with your life. Life IS too short to live in the past, we must live for the present and look forward to the future.

Last, and most importantly, keep your priorities straight. Focus on the most important aspect in your life and make all other things in your life help to attain that goal. Priorities are important so that your life has some direction and meaning.

No person should go through their life without direction, even if that direction alters with time.

What Kind of Do(u)g am I?

Doug Rock

What kind of Dog would I be if I were a dog?
- The patient Labrador waiting
  for the master to come home?
- The excited Brittany running fast
  and free through an open field?
- The obedient Shepherd watching
  the excitement while
  not getting involved?
- The aggressive Rottweiler lunging
  against his own mental restraints?
- The happy Boxer that always
  jumps up to give you a kiss?
- The protective Doberman guarding
  the territory he calls home?
- The working Malamute that knows
  nothing but the weight on his back?
- The hate-filled Pit Bull looking
  for a weakness to kill the opponent?
- The dedicated Golden Retriever running
  to get the slippers on command?
- The annoying Schnauzer trying to nip
  your ankles when you aren't
  looking?

While I could be any of those dogs, I feel that I'm more like the stupid mongrel that always comes back to the master that beats it and hates it...

Reunion?

John Stobart

My first nine years
I lived in Sinclair Lewis Lend
Then I spent three years
Learning streetsmarts in Chicago
Only to be jerked back to Main Street
For adolescence and college,
About another twelve years spent there.
Then I taught English
At the secondary level
For about thirty years
In a Chicago Suburb
Which offers variations on both
    small town/big city life.
So why,
Given a rudimentary contented with
My adult life, both in terms
Of my career and my family and my friends,
So why is it
That I feel so often a stranger, a fraud?
Why do I suspect that the real me
Was abandoned back there over thirty years ago.
And somehow I'm guilty for deserting him.

Many books and personal experiences and
Common sense - all say that the lad is dead
On that his world is gone
That vicarious living or reliving
Is just not clear enough to pass as the same.
Yet I still dream of those days
And I've written about them
And read corroborative books and stories
Written by others. I sometimes think
I'm fated to bump into people or books
That prompt Deja Vu reactions.
So, I'm going to another high school reunion
this summer.
The thirty-fifth
And my wife says it'll make me sort
Of weird for awhile
Like the last one did,
Making me want to grab people
And shove them back into their old clothes
And personalities, wanting to see the
Winnie, Ruth and Paulie of then, not now
Because the idea persists with me
Somehow,
That then was true,
Not now. Reflection, maybe now is
    never real until it's then.

Along Lake Michigan

Francine Tolf

What great stillness dreams
your secret caverns,
your unfathomable depths
that lie tranquil today,
bands of silver resting for miles
across calm?

You stretch tantalizingly to the sky,
blue melting into blue,
mist rising from your waters
sacredly, as if, shining and new,
you were just sung into consciousness.

I've slipped into your dream today,
if only for a shimmering hour:

bare trees lean down to me and beckon—
How could I not have seen before
their fingers and arms?
How could I not have sensed before
the secrets they are longing to share?

Signs cry out to me everywhere—
in the gnarled trunks of cottonwoods,
in the arc of a gull's bright wing—
the very wind knows me,
its caress has never been more intimate.

How tenderly
it kisses the face
of a middle-aged woman
whose being has just
burst into flower.

I Fall

Joe Ward

The dreamer once again awakes
This time blood pouring out of his face
Wondering how and why
simple sadness, caused from hate
people to overcome, beating on my drum
Waiting for the one, to see you
For you to see, hope to bring
A portrait of you and me
Sight come to me, now I can see,
    oh how lovely within
A touch of your skin
Where have you been?
Eruption of the brain, causing great pain
Blood pouring more and more, lying on the floor
Death to me, waiting to see what will bring
My eyes are wet, I'm starting to sweat
Under my skin, pouring out at the seams
Watering my soul
I start to get scared, so I light up a bowl

Truth

D.S. Witt

The needle penetrate my vein
    sends liquid fire
Coursing through my body
elevating my senses
erasing the sorrows of life
    for a while...

It leaves behind
    broken friendships
    missed opportunity
    the pain of irrefutable betrayal

I inject more
    to cover my pain with
    renewed excitement
It washed away the pain of
    loss
leaving more rubble
    on the bottom of my soul

I try to fight the addiction
    but I'm totally dependent
on this drug called
    TRUTH

Wordeater 96 Student Jury:
Nicolle Byrnside
Jeff Hicks
Bob Loewe
Gale Tolf

Alumni
Angela Brooks
Jeff Hicks
Amy Lingafelter
Bob Loewe
Maria Mellinger
Beata M. Parsons
Michael O'Brien
Francine Tolf

Faculty
John Stobart

Prose Award ($5.00)
Milly Laux

Poetry Awards ($5.00)
J. Cavallero
Brad Dornick
Dave Heckler

John Stobart is solely responsible for the awards.

Submission Deadlines
Manuscript and cover designs
must be submitted to:
John Stobart, Room C-1069

by

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This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students are eligible for awards.

WORDEATER

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